

Yeah grill me

Ok what are you working on now?

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1 New Message by mcpleastreet

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Hurt-Comfort, Romance

Language: English

Characters: Eleven/Jane H., Mike W.

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2019-01-02 10:32:56

Updated: 2019-07-07 16:55:53

Packaged: 2019-12-12 18:47:59

Rating: T

Chapters: 12

Words: 36,177

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Jane Hopper has been depressed ever since the death of her little sister. Mike Wheeler has been anxious since the day he was born. They have been each other's number one support system for about a year and a half. Only they've never met. Or seen a picture of one another. They don't even know each other's names. Modern Mileven AU.

1. Virgo: The Beginning of the End

Welcome to my new Mileven story! This is very much inspired by the novel *Letters to the Lost* except with my own twist. I hope you enjoy! And if you've come here from my other stories I'm sorry I haven't been updating! Now you know why.

"Jane Hopper please report to the guidance counselor's office. Jane Hopper to the guidance counselor."

Jane felt her cheeks go red as the eyes of every student in the class landed on her, wondering what kind of trouble she had gotten herself into this time. Though she wasn't exactly a troublemaker her appearance and reputation said differently. In the time she had her dad had moved from Chicago to Hawkins she had been in trouble a total of one time for playing hookie. But because of the way people saw her everyone in the school thought she was about to get chewed out. Which she was. Just not for breaking the rules.

As she packed up her books into her backpack Jane tried to think of an excuse for why her grades were slipping. There was no way she could tell her the real reason. The fact of the matter was that she was depressed.

Jane just didn't care about homework anymore. It was hard enough rolling out of bed and making it to school on time, not to mention sitting in class until 2:50. Doing 2+ hours of homework on top of all that seemed like too much to ask of her.

She felt her phone buzz in her pocket halfway through her walk to the office. Jane pulled it out and checked the text from her red haired best friend. And pretty much her only friend.

What did you do this time? ;)

Jane snickered to herself, knowing that she and Max shared the same reputation of being no good hooligans. ***I keyed the principals cars*** she replied. The difference between them was that Jane preferred to stay out of trouble while Max liked living on the edge. And she was

incredibly good at getting away with anything. Including the principals car after he gave her detention in sophomore year.

Good one. I'll get detention with you if you need me to.

When she spotted the guidance counselor's office she swallowed down her anxiety at what was likely going to be an uncomfortable conversation. She knocked her knuckle against the open door, spotting Mrs. Kelley sitting at her desk with a pair of glasses sitting at the tip of her nose. Mrs. Kelley looked up at the sound and waved Jane inside, then straightened some of her papers up and set her glasses on top of her head. Jane sat down in one of the chairs across from her and set her backpack in the empty one beside her.

"So, Jane" Mrs. Kelley said, locking her fingers together on top of her desk. "I'm sure you know why I called you in here."

She wordlessly nodded her head.

"What's going on, Jane?" she asked, "You said you'd pull it together last semester and you barely passed. This is the year colleges are going to look at on your applications."

Jane had to resist the urge to scoff at the mention of the C word. She knew everyone was hoping that some miracle would occur and she would suddenly be back to her old self and start succeeding again. But she didn't have the heart to tell them that she simply couldn't go to college. She'd flunk out in the first semester. If she got the motivation to apply, that is. And even if she did she doubted she'd get in anywhere with the grades she was getting.

It wasn't like Jane didn't want to do any of the things a normal teenagre did. She wished more than anything that she could be the kind of daughter her father deserved to have; successful and motivated. But what was the point? That was the question that hung over her head every time she tried to muster up the motivation to do anything more productive than going to Max's house.

But Jane wasn't going to tell Mrs. Kelley any of it. There was no point in telling anyone. There was something chemically wrong with her mind. Hand holding and atta-boys weren't going to help her, so she

kept it all to herself.

Of course there was one person she talked to about it.

"What are we going to do Jane?"

There wasn't really a 'we' in the scenario Jane was stuck in but she, once again, chose not to say anything. "I'll do better" she said, though it didn't sound very convincing. "I'll start doing my homework in the library so I can use the textbooks and computers."

Mrs. Kelley smiled at her but Jane could tell by the size of it that what she had suggested wasn't enough. "That's definitely a good start" she said, "But your application needs more if you want to get into a school that matches your potential."

This time she did scoff.

"You're an incredibly bright girl, Jane." Mrs. Kelley, her tone ever so slightly reprimanding. "You're just going through a rough patch. If you put in the work you could go to any college you wanted to."

But what if I don't want to go to college?

"What did you have in mind, exactly?" Jane asked, raising an eyebrow. "Because I'm not doing tutoring or anything."

Mrs. Kelley suppressed a laugh. "No, I wasn't going to suggest tutoring. I was thinking something more extra curricular." she tapped on the one piece of paper she'd left out on her desk. "You haven't gotten involved in any after school programs since you were on track in freshman year."

"Sports season has already started," Jane pointed out. "Pretty sure it's too late."

"For sports it's too late," Mrs. Kelley agreed. "But it isn't for the school play."

If Jane had been drinking water she would have spit it out like she was in a sitcom. "*School play?*"

"Auditions are tomorrow," she said, "You don't *have* to go. But I think it would look really good on your application. Even if you just get a small part. And they're doing *the Crucible* which isn't very hokey."

"All plays are hokey."

"Just give it a shot, Jane."

She absolutely did *not* want to have anything to do with the school play. It would just be another responsibility to fail at and an opportunity to let people down. Plus Jane wasn't an actress. And if there was any singing and dancing involved? Forget about it. Even if she made it in, went to rehearsals, and showed up for the performance she'd make a total fool of herself. Doing the school play was absolutely not in her best interest.

On the other hand, doing the school play would get Mrs. Kelley and her dad off her back. It would leave her dad unable to say that she needed to be more social and make new friends. And if she totally bombed the audition and didn't make the cut she could still say she tried.

"Okay." Jane said once she reached the end of her train of thought.
"I'll audition."

An ear to ear grin spread on Mrs. Kelley's face and almost made Jane feel guilty for her plan. "That's great to hear." she said with the same enthusiasm Jane expected for someone hearing their own child had gotten into the school play. "I know things haven't been easy since Sarah, but they'll turn around soon."

Hearing her younger sister's name was like an iron fist connecting with her chest at 70 mph. Jane had been 12 when her sister got sick, 13 when they moved to Hawkins to be closer to the best children's cancer hospital in Indiana, and 14 when Sarah died. Despite the 4 year age gap between the, Sarah had been Jane's best friend for as long as she could remember.

Her death quite literally tore the family apart. Jane refused to leave her room for anything other than meals for a month, and missed school for 2. Her fathers more than occasional drinking turned into

an addiction. Her mother was too consumed in her own grief to deal with theirs so she moved back to her parents house in Nashville.

Two years later and her dad was consistently on the wagon, her mother was remarried with a son, and Jane was still depressed. She learned how to function through the black fog constantly in her mind but she was still the shadow of the Jane she had once been. Everything about her life that had anything to do with Sarah had been cut out of the picture. Even the piano, something Jane had once been passionate about and even began teaching Sarah, hadn't been touched in 2 years, 4 months, and 12 days.

People had been telling her that things would get better since she was 14/ She was sick of hearing it. Either tell her *when* it was going to get better or don't tell her at all. But of course she couldn't say her bitter, angry thoughts out loud. Especially when people like Mrs. Kelley just wanted to help her. Jane did the same thing she did every time someone brought up Sarah; forced a smile and said "thank you."

"I've held you hostage long enough." Mrs. Kelley said. "You can head to lunch early. Or go back to class if you'd like."

Jane smiled for real and grabbed her backpack. "I think I'll stick with lunch." she said, thanking her before heading out into the hallway.

As she walked to the cafeteria she focused on breathing in the air that had been knocked out of her lungs from thinking about Sarah. She purposely took the long way, thinking that a bit of a walk might clear her head. It helped. But it wasn't what she really needed.

When she made it to the cafeteria Jane sat at her usual table she shared with Max towards the back of the room. Her footsteps echoed and bounced off the walls in a way that gave her the creeps. But the creepy feeling quickly faded when she opened an email she'd gotten that morning and hadn't had the chance to respond to yet.

She'd met Leo over the summer in an online chatroom and had talked every day since. It was an anonymous forum for teenagers struggling with mental illness that he'd already been a part of when she joined. It was the one place she had felt she could really be truthful about how much she was struggling. She didn't have to worry about

running into any of them at school. And she could say anything she wanted and they had no way of knowing if it was true.

But ever since she and Leo started emailing privately she hardly ever used the site. What was the point when he always knew exactly what to say to make her feel better?

Leo was 17, a senior, and probably the most nervous person on the face of the earth. Even in writing she could sometimes feel his anxiety as if she were standing right next to him. But he was also one of the funniest and most caring people she'd ever talked to. He made her laugh and blush in almost every email he sent her. If they knew each other in person Jane was pretty sure she'd fall in love with him.

Virgo,

If you saw me last night I think you would have been proud of me.

My friends tricked me into going to a party a town over from mine. They said it was going to be a small get together at the house of someone my best friend knows. I didn't really want to go but I know you would have been mad at me if I didn't so I went.

Well, the small get together ended up being a house party straight out of a movie. Red solo cups were everywhere and people were skinny dipping in the pool out back. I would have gone home but my friend drove us and it was too far away to walk.

I only had 1 anxiety attack the whole night, which was when we first got there. Alcohol helped. Staying outside the whole time helped.

Some girl tried to kiss me and gave me her phone number when I made an excuse about being sick. She wrote it on a napkin and I threw it in the pool when she left.

My first time kissing someone was also the first time I got drunk. They both sucked. I have a feeling they're not a good combination for me.

After I threw her number out it occurred to me that it could have been you and I almost had another anxiety attack. But I figured you

weren't the type of person to go around kissing people at parties. I also figured I could just ask you if you went to any parties last night.

Please tell me you'll try more at school. I know it's hard but there's only 5 more months until summer and you need good grades to have the option of college open. I know you don't want to go but you can't destroy your chances.

If you need help studying we can try a phone call again.

Leo

Jane's heart skipped a beat at the last line of his email. Back in september Jane had suggested they talk on the phone and sent him her number. They set a date and time to talk. Jane had no idea he'd even been nervous until he went radio silent on her and emailed her the next morning apologizing her and telling her he'd practically had a nervous breakdown. Neither of them brought up the call again. Was he really willing to go through all that again just to help her study?

Leo,

I'm SO proud of you! Holy crap I can't believe you went to a party. Please tell me one of your friends took a video of you dancing that you can send me. I'll even pay you for it. A skinny dipping video will suffice too.

This is exactly why you need to get out of your comfort zone more. It sounds like you almost had fun! If I promise to try harder on my homework will you promise to go to another party?

I can guarantee you that girl wasn't me since I was at home rewatching Law and Order again. Why didn't you want to kiss her? Was she ugly? Did she have bad breath or something? That would have been really out of your comfort zone.

It's funny that you mention school because the guidance counselor just told me I need to get my grades up or I won't get into a good college. I hate that college is the default option for life after high school.

She also told me that I need to join some extracurriculars so my application will look more desirable. Long story short I have to audition for the school play tomorrow. Imagine me being in the school play? I can't either.

Sorry to be a Debbie Downer but why does any of this matter? Even if I had the grades to go to college I wouldn't go. Though I might consider doing more studying if it means you'll call me. Only if you're comfortable, of course. I don't mind waiting. I'll be here.

Virgo

Jane didn't have to wait long for the bell to ring and for students to start filing into the cafeteria. She spotted Max's red hair almost as soon as she stepped through the door. She hoisted her backpack up on her shoulder and headed straight for their table and sliding into the seat across from her. "Spill."

She smirked and set her phone down on the table. "They caught me. I got suspended for a week."

"Very funny." Max said sarcastically. "Seriously, what happened Jane?"

She leaned back in her chair, crossing her arms under her chest. "My grades are slipping."

"What's new?"

"I'll tell you what's new; I have to audition for the school play tomorrow."

Max's jaw practically dropped to the floor, her lips turning up in a smile as she likely imagined Jane in any sort of stage production.
"Are you serious?"

"Completely serious. Unfortunately."

"Please tell me you're not going to purposely bomb it?"

Jane raised an eyebrow at her. "That's exactly what I was planning on doing." she said. "Why? You want me to actually try it?"

"I want you to get out of this funk. And if the school play is what does it then I'll sign up for crew so you're not alone." Max crossed her arms on the table top. "I know you're sick of hearing it but I can say it because I love you; I'm worried about you."

Jane waved her off. "Don't be."

"I won't if you audition for the stupid play." Max said. Her posture relaxed a bit as she changed the subject. "Have you heard from your boyfriend?"

"Yep, he just got back from his trip to England to meet the queen."

According to Max it was pretty obvious that Jane was talking to a boy and no amount of coaxing could convince her otherwise. Jane eventually gave up and started telling the wildest stories she could think of whenever she asked about Leo.

Jane had considered telling her about him, and what their relationship actually was, but even the thought made her face catch on fire. Plus, how could she ever accurately describe her and Leo without sounding crazy? One of the few issues with telling a stranger things her loved ones didn't know was she couldn't tell her loved ones. Not only would they probably not understand but they'd probably be hurt. It was just another aspect of Jane's life that she kept to herself.

"What does he look like?

Jane shrugged, "Don't know. I've never seen a picture of him."

"You're hysterical."

Jane wished she was kidding.

2. Leo: Strange Interactions

Thank you so much to everyone that gave me feedback on my last chapter! I'm glad that you guys are enjoying this story so far, it makes me really happy because I've had the idea for this story for awhile. I've been writing a lot while I'm at work and I'm already on chapter nine so I need to start putting chapters out more! Anyway, I hope you guys like this chapter!

Also if anyone is interested in following my fan/editing account on instagram the handle is mcplestreet

I'll be here.

Even a week later the words still put a smile on Mike's face every time he thought about them. He was always terrified that one day he'd wake up and she would vanish into thin air never to be heard from again. It was one of the few fears he'd never told Virgo about. Mostly because it kind of made it seem like he was obsessed with her. Which, considering that the only reason he regretted kissing someone was because it might have been her, was probably true.

Mike was pretty sure that anyone who knew Virgo must have been obsessed with her. At least anyone who knew her like he did. Talking to her was like talking to someone he'd known his whole life. She was also incredibly funny and caring. Though Mike hated to admit it he had a feeling that Virgo cared about him more than his own parents did. She was definitely more up to date on what was going on with him.

Which was why he felt guilty for being so anxious about calling her on the phone.

Despite what he'd told her the first time he hadn't actually been that anxious. Sure, he was nervous he might say something stupid or not be able to think of anything to say at all. But it was Virgo. He knew so much about her, and she knew even more about him. Mike knew he didn't have to be nervous around her.

Until he got her phone number, that is.

Mike knew they were close enough to be in the same time zone. But never in a million years did he expect her to have the same area code as him. Meaning that she was, at the most, a thirty minute drive from him. What if he'd met her before? What if they went to the same school? What if she knew who he was and thought he was the biggest loser on the face of the planet? She would have been right, but Mike didn't want her to know it.

He had spent months trying to build up the courage to talk to her on the phone. Every time he thought about her recognizing his voice and never speaking to him again his chest got tight and he felt like he couldn't breathe. He had to weigh his options; risk losing her from making her wait too long or risk losing her because she found out who he really was. Both options sucked and left him stuck between a rock and a hard place.

Even over email he had learned how to read between the lines to see how she was doing. Mike could tell that recently she had been struggling a bit more than usual. She hardly ever spoke about herself and her life and when she did it was never about school. Which was definitely a touchy subject for her. He knew she got annoyed when people tried to motivate her to do more work, but she knew that he did it out of love, so they compromised. He never mentioned school unless he felt it was necessary and she didn't get annoyed when he did.

Mike figured that offering to talk on the phone might sweeten the deal of getting her to study more. He could always hide his number when he did call her.

A week later and he was still daydreaming about getting to talk to Virgo on the phone. What kind of accent would she have? She told him she used to live in the city, but never which one. Would she be shy? Would she tease him for being shy? Would she think he wasn't as interesting over the phone and not want to talk to him anymore? The way things were with them were so certain and perfect, and any changing variables made his heart race. He asked her to send him the study material from her teacher to stall a bit.

After the last bell Mike headed to the empty art classroom where he and his best friends held the photography club. Back in middle school AV had been more their thing. But the high school didn't have an AV club and photography seemed like the next best thing. Plus no one else was really a part of it. So they mostly had the room to themselves. Most of the time they just used the empty classroom to goof off. Dustin and Lucas didn't really care about photos at all, and while it wasn't a passion of Mike's he'd been told he had a knack for it. Which was why they weren't totally screwed when the teachers in charge of the school play asked if they could film opening night.

His friends were standing outside of the locked classroom, waiting for him to open it up with the key he'd been given since he was president. He fished it out of his pocket and pushed the door open, dropping his backpack onto one of the tables with his friends following suit behind him. Even though opening night wasn't for another three and a half months they were still going to find out what the perfect camera angles and lighting were.

Mike was just putting the tripod strap over his shoulder when Will came to stand next to him, taking one of the four cameras they had. "Have you heard from her today?" he asked, his voice low enough so that Dustin and Lucas wouldn't hear from the opposite side of the room.

"I always hear from her." Mike said, keeping his voice just as low. "She stays up too late and sends me something after I fall asleep."

"How is she?"

"Not great, I think."

Will was the only person who knew about Virgo and he'd found out completely by accident. Mike had been showing him something on his phone when she sent him an email. Though he kept a lot of details to himself, like how they'd met or the kinds of things they talked about, he did tell Will about her. It had been almost a month after the phone call incident and it felt good to get the worries off his chest. Will did his best to assure him that there was no way she'd be that shallow that she'd stop talking to him just because he was low on the social ladder. But Will knew that there were some things Mike

just couldn't be convinced of.

Once they all got the equipment they needed they went back out into the hallway, the others waiting while Mike locked the door behind them. After checking the handle wouldn't budge he put the keys back in his pocket and turned towards the direction of the auditorium and coming face to face with a girl that took a quick step back so that she wouldn't get hit with his tripod.

"Hey, watch where you're going." she snapped once she was at a safe distance.

It took him a second to recognize her as the chiefs daughter. Though she was barely over 5'3" there was still something kind of intimidating about her, and not just her familial connections. Maybe it was the way she scowled at him that made it clear she had lots of practice with the particular expression. Or maybe it was the thick liner she had around her eyes and all black outfit she had on.

"You have the whole hallway and you're gonna walk right where I can hit you?" Mike asked her in response.

Jane's scowl deepend. "Whatever," she said, stepping around him. "Just be careful with that thing."

She walked past him and his friends and down the hall, disappearing into the girls bathroom about ten feet away. As she walked he could hear her combat boots squeaking against the tile floor. In his peripheral vision Mike saw Dustin shiver. "Man," he said, "That chick is scary."

"Careful what you say," Lucas warned him as they started heading towards the auditorium, "Her dad might arrest you for slander."

"I don't think you get arrested for slander. I think you get sued." Mike pointed out.

"Whatever, sued" Lucas replied. "All I know is that you shouldn't get on her bad side, Mike."

Mike scoffed at him. "So I'm supposed to watch out for her with my back to her, but she sees me coming and doesn't have to? She's not

untouchable because she's the chiefs kid."

"I think she is." Will countered. "That's why she's never gotten detention before."

By the time they made it to the auditorium rehearsal had already started. The drama teacher sat in the first row of chairs while the cast sat on the floor of the state, everyone doing a table read of their lines. Dustin and Lucas headed up to the projection room to start messing with the lights while Mike and Will stayed on the floor, Mike on the left side of the room and Will on the right, to try and figure out good camera angles. He set up his tripod halfway down the aisle. Mike was just turning on the camera when his phone buzzed with an email.

Leo,

Everyone I know is officially crazy.

I told you about the school play thing, right? Well my best friend joined the crew so I wouldn't have to be alone. Which was nice of her and all but now she can only work on the weekends. I told her she didn't have to but she wouldn't listen to me.

My dad thinks that me joining the school play is the coolest thing since sliced bread. He already took off work for the show. And not just opening night. All three nights. He's even going to get his friend (who I think might be his girlfriend) and her son's to come. He's going to embarrass the living hell out of me.

Even I'm going crazy. I studied for a test last night. For a whole twenty minutes. I was stuck at school for a little while waiting for my dad to pick me up and my phone was dying so I didn't have anything else to do. It was for an algebra test I took today and if I don't pass it I'm never studying again.

Can you believe I purposely did bad at the auditions and I still got a speaking role? I'm in the company but still. I have to remember a whole two lines. Add that to the list of things you have to help me study for.

That was a joke. You don't have to help me study if you're only asking to be polite. But if you're asking because you genuinely want to and you're sure you're okay with talking on the phone I really appreciate it.

Virgo

"Take a picture, it'll last longer."

Mike looked up from his phone at the sound of a voice nearby, his eyes landing on Jane Hopper standing just a few feet away. For a second he expected her to yell at him or something, until she cracked a smile. "Get it?" she said, "Cause you have a camera."

He cracked a small, slightly nervous version of her own. Her dramatic change in demeanor was slightly unnerving. "Oh, yeah."

"That was stupid." she said, shaking her head a few times. "Why are you filming rehearsal?"

"Well we're filming opening night." Mike explained, "Right now we're just figuring out angles and lighting and all that technical shit."

"Sounds kind of boring."

"Kind of."

Her small smile began to grow. "You guys gonna be here every day?"

Mike shrugged, not sure how to answer since they hadn't really worked that detail out. "Probably not. Maybe just once a week."

"So I guess I shouldn't keep yelling at you."

"Not unless you want a really unflattering up close shot to make the cut."

Jane let out a single laugh. For someone so dark and tough looking she had a very girlish laugh. "Funny. What's your name?"

"Mike Wheeler."

"Jane Hopper."

"Yeah, I know."

Her smile turned into a smirk as she shook her head again. "Yeah, right." she said, turning towards the stage. "See you around Mike Wheeler."

She made her way down the aisle and over to the stairs to the stage, sitting down on the floor with, but slightly distant from, the rest of the group. Jane Hopper didn't seem like the theatre type of person, but Mike supposed she could have kept it a secret for appearance purposes. Or maybe she needed it for her college application like Virgo.

Mike set the camera and pressed the shutter, letting it record so he'd be able to look back at the angle later on. While he did he typed out a quick reply to his email.

Virgo,

Your dad and his girl haven't made things official yet? Tell him to hurry up or she's gonna find someone else. Also tell him that it's cool that he's getting back out into the dating game after you know who.

All I'm gonna say is that if you still made it into the play when you were purposely being bad then that either means no one auditioned or you're a really good actress.

Turns out that I'm actually involved in the school play at my school too. I'm not acting in it or anything exciting so I'll spare you the boring details.

I really do want to help you. And I still feel bad about acting like a total spaz the first time we were supposed to talk. I'm too embarrassed to tell you why. Which sounds stupid because I know I don't have to be embarrassed around you. If you knew why you'd understand.

I'm being really vague. Sorry.

People are being weird here too. There's this girl at school who's

kind of infamous. I've never spoken to her before today and it was one of the most confusing interactions I've had in awhile. Maybe the government is putting stuff in the water.

I don't think you're crazy.

Leo

He hit send and tucked his phone into his pocket just as Will started walking over to him. Mike shut off the camera, figuring he'd gotten enough footage to tell if it was a good angle or not. Will had his camera around his neck and a tripod on his back. "I'm gonna try the front row, you try the back row?"

"Yeah."

Will nodded his head in the direction of the stage. "Saw you talking to Jane."

"Yeah, it was weird." Mike said, taking his own camera off the tripod and hanging it off his neck. "She made a joke and then did some small talk. She said she'd see me around."

He raised an eyebrow. "Weird is right." he agreed. "Maybe she was mean to you before because she has a crush on you."

Mike scoffed at him. "She didn't even know my name until five minutes ago."

"Virgo doesn't know your name and she has a crush on you."

Mike held his hand up and counted his points on his fingers. "First of all that's way different. Virgo pretty much knows everything about me and I've never even spoken to Jane before today. Second of all Virgo doesn't have a crush on me. She's never met me."

"So?" Will asked. "You've never met her and you have a crush on her."

Crush wasn't the word Mike would use but there was no point in arguing semantics. "Whatever. Point is that Jane doesn't have a crush on me. She's just strange I guess."

"Maybe Jane is Virgo."

"Don't be ridiculous." Mike said, rolling her eyes. "Jane moved here because of her sister, remember? I think Virgo would have mentioned having a dead sister at least once in a year."

"Yeah, but didn't she move to a small town from the city?"

"Because her parents got a divorce."

"Jane's parents are divorced."

Mike laughed. "So are yours. Are you Virgo?"

Will rolled his eyes and gave him a shove. "Get your ass to the back row."

There was a chance that Virgo went to Hawkins High School, and even a chance that they'd spoke to each other in person without even knowing it. Mike had thought about all the girls from school he knew that would fit her the best. There were a few names that made the list of possibilities. And though he'd spoken to Jane Hopper a total of five minutes he was pretty sure it wasn't her. Jane was much too rough around the edges to be Virgo. Not that being rough around the edges was a bad thing. It wasn't necessarily. But it just didn't who the hell was it?

3. Virgo: Rainy Days

Holy crap! We're only two chapters into this story and you guys are already so supportive of it! Seeing your reviews that you like this story so far really makes me smile. Even though I'm only uploading chapter 3 now I've written up to chapter 10. I handwrite this story while I'm at work and I'm only just now getting the time to type it all up. If you guys are excited now just wait to see what I have in store for these two!

Leo,

My day officially sucks.

Remember that test I studied for? I got a C. It's better than failing, I know, but you'd think I'd get a better grade than that.

I told my dad to pick me up right after school because I'm not feeling well so I'm skipping rehearsal today. He said it was alright but five minutes before the bell rang he said he had to stay late at work. I don't mind walking home but it's raining and I live on the other side of town.

I don't know why I'm being so negative and telling you all this. I'm sorry. I guess I'm just frustrated of life sucking all the time. Maybe I'm just a negative person. Sometimes I feel bad for you since you have to listen to me when I get like this. Well, I guess you don't have to. You want to.

I hope your day was better.

Virgo

Jane set her phone down in her lap and leaned her head against the bench she was sitting on next to the front entrance of the school. Raindrops were falling from the sky so hard she could hear them landing on the pavement even from inside. She propped her feet up on the bench and let her arms drape across her lap. Though she would have liked to go home after the day she'd had she was glad

that she at least had some time to clear her head before her dad picked her up.

Considering that Jane had exactly one speaking line in the school play she figured it was safe for her to miss a rehearsal or two. Being one of the Afflicted Girls in *the Crucible* sounded like a main role in theory, but when taking into account that pretty much the only thing she did was scream incoherently and flail around she figured she didn't quite count. The only intelligible line she had in the whole play was "I saw Goodie Proctor with the devil" which she had memorized the day they got the script.

Even if she needed more practice Jane just didn't have it in her. She felt more deflated and bland than usual. Getting up that morning and doing her work had taken extra effort. Her dad left too early for him to notice, but Max had definitely seen. She pestered worried questions at Jane during lunch and she did her best to assure her she was just feeling under the weather due to allergies.

"Shouldn't you be in rehearsal?"

Jane turned away from the window, her eyes landing on Mike Wheeler standing a few feet away from her. Though he had the hood of his rain jacket up she could still tell that the humidity from the weather had made his black hair start to curl. His pale face had flushed a light pink color under the layer of freckles scattered across his skin. A mix of curiosity and amusement played in his expression and made for quite the combination on his particular face.

"Shouldn't you?" she questioned back, not bothering to move her feet in case he wanted to sit down. Jane wasn't exactly in a small talk mood. Plus, by the looks of his rain jacket, he was planning on going out.

"Once a week, remember?" he asked her. "We were there yesterday."

Jane hadn't remembered. It had been three weeks since rehearsals started and therefore three weeks since the last time she'd spoken to Mike Wheeler. It was a miracle she remembered his name and what he did. But she felt particularly bad about the first impression she'd made on him. It was the kind of thing her dad, Max, and Leo

chastised her for; her talent of becoming instantly irritable.

Which was why she'd apologized to him, something she was known for avoiding. She was trying to change herself for the better. Not necessarily for herself but for the people who cared about her. Particularly Leo. She wanted to become the best possible version of herself there could be before the chance to meet him came up. Which she told herself would come eventually. If she began to believe that she'd never meet Leo then the ever growing feeling of hopelessness might swallow her whole.

"You waiting for someone?" Mike asked her when she didn't respond.
"Or do you just like to hang out at school for the hell of it?"

"Funny," she said flatly. "My dad's working late so he can't come get me until 6."

Mike pulled his phone out of his pocket to check the current time.
"It's only 3:30."

"Gee thanks."

He rolled his eyes and put his phone back. "Do you want a ride home?"

His offer took a moment to register in her mind. When it did her mouth hung open slightly and her eyebrows shot up. She certainly wouldn't offer a ride to someone who had gotten cross with her the first time they met. "Seriously?"

"You gonna yell at me again?"

"No."

"Then get your ass in the car Hopper."

Jane didn't need to be told twice. In a second she swung her legs off the bench and onto the floor, threw her backpack onto her shoulder, and pulled her hood over her head. Mike pushed the front door open and they made a mad dash through the rain across the parking lot. She was forced to blindly follow him since she had no idea what his car looked like or where it was. Unfortunately for them he was

parked on the opposite side of the parking lot. She spotted it when he took his keys out and unlocked it with the remote, the lights flashing when he did.

They collapsed into the front seats and tried to catch their breath, Mike shoving the keys into the ignition to turn on the heat. It wasn't until her pulse started to slow and her skin began to thaw that she realized she was alone with a boy. In his car. She'd never had any male friends before, much less a male to sit in the car with.

Mike put the car into gear and began to pull the car out of the parking space. "Where do you live?"

"Cherry Street."

He fell silent as he pulled up to the light at the intersection and then onto the main road. The rain landing on the roof of the car helped to make up for all the silence. Part of Jane was tempted to try and strike up some kind of conversation. The other part wished they could stay silent for the whole ride. She waited to see what he would do instead of deciding.

"You never answered my question," he said once they were a few blocks away from the school.

She turned her head to look at him, instantly noticing his hair had gotten curlier and his cheeks had gotten pinker since they were inside. "Which was?"

"Why aren't you at rehearsal?"

Jane absolutely didn't want to tell him why she hadn't gone. She wasn't even going to tell Max or her dad. She was even considering if the real reason was worth mentioning to Leo. It wasn't like it was anything new. Plus the stupid play had given them all hope that things were going to be different with her. Which she doubted they would.

She had to tell him something. Just not the truth. "I got my period."

"Oh, okay," he said. Like with all boys she expected some kind of animated reaction of embarrassment or disgust when the topic of

menstruation came up. Instead he asked "Do you need to pick something up?"

Jane was, for a moment, speechless. Even her dad became bashful at the mention of periods. She had been convinced that it was physically impossible for a man to be so casual at the subject. "I don't have my period," she blurted out. "I just expected it to freak you out if I said it."

A smirk spread on Mike's lips, her eyes lingering for a second too long. "I live with 3 women who all get it. It doesn't freak me out anymore. Sorry to disappoint you."

"How dare you be the only sensible person of the male species."

His smirk changed to a full grin. "I can freak out if you want me to," he offered, "But I'll still be curious why you didn't go."

Jane sighed, sinking down in her seat slightly. "I just didn't want to," she said, "I didn't even want to sign up for the stupid play in the first place."

"Then why did you?"

"My dad made me," she lied, too ashamed to admit how shit her grades were. "He said it would be a good way to make friends."

Mike snorted. "So you joined the school play to make friends and in the same day yell at a stranger for no reason?"

She turned in her seat to face him. "Are you going to hold that over my head forever? Because, as I'm sure you can imagine, that wasn't exactly a good day."

"Woah, relax," Mike said. "I was kidding. I won't bring it up anymore."

Jane sighed and turned to face forward again. They drove another block or so before she decided to speak up again. "My friends say I have an attitude problem."

"I see what they mean."

She reached over and punched his arm. "Shut up Wheeler."

"I better be careful before your dad arrests me."

She laughed and shook her head. "Oh yeah, definitely," Jane said. "He arrests everyone that mildly inconvenienced me. It started in elementary school when kids started cutting me in the lunch line. He rounded up ten kids at after school pick up one time."

"In that case Mike Wheeler's Taxi Service is open 24/7."

Jane laughed again, feeling some of her awkwardness at the fact that they were alone start to slow away.

It helped that Mike's laugh was gorgeous.

"Seriously though," he said once he had calmed down. "If after rehearsal you need a ride I can take you home. I'll still be at school anyway."

She raised an eyebrow at him. "Really?"

He pulled the car up to a red light and held out his hand. "Give me your phone."

Jane pulled her phone and set it down in his hand, giving him a look of confusion. He ignored her and tapped on her screen a few times and handed her phone back to her a few minutes later. "There," he said.

She looked down at the screen and a smile broke out on her face when she saw the new contact added named **Mike Wheeler** with a little car and camera icon next to it. "Cute."

"I thought so."

Jane put her phone away and looked over at him again. With him facing forward she could see his sharp jaw and high cheekbones. Every time she saw him he got more handsome. She didn't like it. "You really don't have to, though."

"I know."

"Then why are you doing it?"

"Apparently I need to make friends too."

Jane wasn't sure to do with this information. She knew what people would *want* her to do. But she didn't know what *she* wanted to do. She settled for changing the topic. "So why are you bothering with this stuff with the play when you're graduating?"

He shrugged. "I like it. Photography, I mean. Not the play. I mean it's fine, it's just not my thing." Mike explained. "I guess it gives me something to do."

"You can't think of anything better to do?" Jane asked before she could think about it.

But Mike didn't seem to mind. In fact, he laughed. "No, apparently not. And neither can my friends since they're helping me."

"You're a senior." she said, "Shouldn't you be doing stuff like going to parties?"

He rolled his eyes. "I'm not really a party person."

"Really?" Jane asked sarcastically. "I totally had you pegged for one."

"You're kind of an asshole, you know."

"So I've been told."

Mike pulled onto her street and she pointed out her house halfway down the block. He parked on the curb and she grabbed her backpack off the ground, preparing to dash out through the rain. "I'll see you around?"

"Yes you will."

Jane flashed him the best attempt at a smile she could muster before opening the door and running up the walkway to the front door.

Once she was inside she kicked off her shoes and shed her wet clothes before hurrying into her room down the hall so she could

change into sweatpants. She'd barely gotten the chance to warm up from being out in the rain the first time. Jane was shivering as she took her books out of her bag and spread them out on her bed, staring them down. She *would* do homework that night. Even if it was just one class. She was so determined that she figured it was safe to make a snack for herself.

Standing in the kitchen while her popcorn popped in the microwave she pulled her phone out and went to the new contact in her phone, smiling again to herself. She sent a quick text to Mike before dumping her snack into her bowl and heading back into her room. ***Thanks again Taxi Man.***

Jane decided to work on her English homework first since she just had to read two and a half chapters of a book they were working on in class. She put music on her phone and wrapped herself up some of her coziest blankets so she would be as comfortable as possible. Discomfort was one of her biggest distractions. So was her phone buzzing.

With a groan she set her book down and picked her phone up, surprised to find 3 messages. One from her dad, one from Mike, and one from Leo. Mike sent her a picture of a New York taxi that was edited to have his name on the side, which made her laugh. With butterflies in her stomach she opened up her latest message from Leo.

Virgo,

Stop apologizing or I'll track your IP address and come yell at you myself. You have nothing to be sorry for, okay? It's frustrating how hard you are on yourself.

You're one of the hardest working people I know. And I know you won't believe that because you never believe anything I say. But the fact that it's so hard for you to go to school, yet you not only go every day but stay an extra hour and a half for rehearsal, is totally insane.

Have you ever thought about taking meds? My best friends mom took them when she went through her divorce and said it really helped. Obviously it's not for everyone. I'm just wondering.

I know you can do it without meds. But it's hard. And I think that if meds would make it easier for you than you should do it. Things don't have to be so hard all the time. And they definitely shouldn't be for someone as awesome as you.

I take meds. It helps. Think about it.

Leo

His email left her so giddy that she had to set her phone down and stare up at the ceiling to be alone with her thoughts before she replied to him. How did he always know exactly what to say to make her feel good enough? Feel like she was wanted? Maybe it had something to do with the fact that it was what he needed to hear as well. Maybe he was just amazing.

She needed to meet him. But she didn't want to scare him off. She had to toe the line carefully.

Leo,

I think you think too highly of me. Which is probably what you would say if I told you what I think of you. Great minds think alike.

I never really thought about taking meds before. I've never known anyone who's taken them so no one's ever suggested it to me before. To be honest it kind of scares me. My brain is already so messed up, I don't want it to get worse.

I didn't know you were on meds. Is that new or did you purposely not tell me because you were embarrassed?

Maybe when we talk on the phone you can tell me what meds are like.

Virgo

Any chance of doing homework was hopeless once she started to imagine what Leo's voice would sound like.

4. Leo: One on One

haha oops i promised I would upload this awhile ago but then totally didn't. my bad. I hope you guys like this update regardless of how late it is.

Virgo,

Remember when I said I wasn't nervous about college? Suddenly I am. I feel like I can't breathe whenever I think about it.

I know where I'm going. I know what I'm majoring in. Everything is set in stone. But I don't think I've ever been so terrified in my life.

Everyone pressured me into doing Computer Programming because I'm good with computers and didn't really know what else I wanted to do. But you have to be really smart for Computer Programming. And, despite what everyone thinks, I'm not really that smart. Yes, I get good grades. But if my mental health starts to dip at all my grades plummet. And I know that once I start college my mental health is going to go into the toilet.

I wish you were coming to college with me. I know I'd be able to do it if you were there with me. None of my friends are going to the same school as me. Yeah, we're all going local. But they won't be on the same campus. If any of my friends were going to be at school with me I'd want it to be you.

But even though I don't know where you're from I know you won't be in school with me in September because you're only a junior. Unless you're secretly some kind of super genius and you're skipping your senior year. That would be awesome.

Please tell me I can do this.

Leo

The screen of Mike's camera blinked a few times before the battery died in the middle of one of the many trial scenes of the school play.

He let out a frustrated sigh before hanging his camera off his neck and grabbing his tripod. Rehearsal was almost over and since it took 2 hours for his camera to fully recharge Mike figured it would be safe to leave a little early for once.

He walked out the double doors from the auditorium to the hallway and heard two voices arguing almost instantly. The familiar feeling of anxiety grabbing hold of his stomach made him hesitate to walk any further. Did he really want to walk right into someone's argument? What if he got dragged into it? What if they started hitting each other and Mike got in trouble?

The logical side of his brain knew he was being stupid and forced him to continue walking with the hope that maybe the fight was in the opposite direction. Those hopes were soon crushed when the voices started getting louder.

"Just talk to me!"

"I *do* talk to you."

"You clearly don't since I have no idea what's going on with you!"

Mike turned the corner and felt his stomach drop when he spotted Jane and who was clearly her best friend Max standing just a few feet away. They both turned to look at him when he came into view. He could see Jane's cheeks flush bright pink before her head fell to look at the floor while Max turned back to her friend.

"Whatever," she said, crossing her arms under her chest. "Give me a call when you actually feel like talking to me for once."

Max stormed past Mike and disappeared down the hall as she headed back for the auditorium. Mike watched Jane, unsure of what to say in the situation he'd gotten himself into, and for a moment was certain she might cry. Which he hoped she wouldn't since all the black eyeliner she wore would start to run. Before she did she straightened her jaw and picked her head up and she looked fine once again. Still, he felt like he had to say something.

"You okay?" he asked her, which seemed like a pretty dumb question.

Obviously she wasn't okay if she was fighting with her best friend.

But she nodded anyway, even though it was clear through her facial expression that it was a lie. "Yeah, yeah, I'm fine."

Should he call her out on the lie? Let it drop since she didn't seem to want to talk about it? As sad as it might sound Mike was pretty sure she didn't have any other friends. During rehearsal Max was the only person that he ever saw Jane talking to. Not that he was paying attention to her. He'd just noticed. Did she have anyone else to talk to when she and Max were fighting?

"You wanna talk about it?" Mike asked her after a bit of hesitation. He figured it couldn't hurt to ask. Unless she started yelling at him again.

Jane let out a long sigh. "Um... I don't know."

"I'll give you a ride home if you talk about it."

A small smile replaced the downtrodden expression she had on from her fight with Max. "Okay, deal." she said happily. "Can we go now? I don't wanna go back."

Mike shrugged, "Yeah, sure."

She walked with him to the art room so he could put away his camera and grab his backpack before they walked back to the auditorium so she could get her stuff. Mike hung back while she went backstage, wandering over to his friends who were all looking at Lucas' camera.

"I'm gonna head out, guys." Mike said. "My camera died and it's gonna take too long to recharge."

"You can use mine." Dustin offered, "I'm working on the lights today."

Mike shifted his weight from one foot to the other, anticipating a bit of teasing from his friends. "Well I told someone I'd give them a ride home so I should probably go."

"Who?"

"... Jane Hopper."

Dustin and Lucas exchanged a glance while a wide grin spread on Will's face. Mike was tempted to walk away right then and there so he wouldn't have to hear their teasing but figured that would just look worse.

"Again?" Lucas asked. "Twice in one week."

"Twice in 9 days." Mike corrected.

"What does the chiefs house look like?" Dustin asked.

"Did she smoke in your car?"

"Is her dad gonna arrest you for being alone with her?"

Mike shoved both Dustin and Lucas' shoulders and rolled his eyes at them. "Cut it out, will you?" he asked, glancing around to make sure Jane wasn't in earshot. She wasn't even in eyesight so he figured he was safe. "She's actually alright, you know. She got in a fight with her friend so I'm gonna take her to Benny's."

"Good choice." Will said, "That's a great spot for a first date."

Mike groaned. "God, you too? I don't like her, she doesn't like me. I don't know anything about her." Out of the corner of his eye he saw her come out from backstage with her backpack on her shoulders and a sweatshirt draped over her arm. "I have to go." he told his friends. "You better not ogle at her like idiots."

"Have fun on your date loverboy."

Mike gave Dustin another shove before meeting Jane in the aisle and walking out the auditorium doors together. He could tell both by her body language and her silence that the fight with Max was bothering her more than she was letting on. He didn't blame her. If he got into that kind of argument with one of his friends he'd definitely be upset. He had no clue what they were fighting about but it hadn't sounded pleasant.

When they got into his car Jane was still quiet so he decided to speak

up first. "I'm pretty hungry, what about you?" he looked over and saw her shrug. "We can go get something to eat."

"Sure."

Jane didn't seem to be in the mood to chat so Mike turned on the radio while they drove to Benny's downtown. Mike could feel anxiety leaking into his veins not only at the fact that they were alone but that she was clearly upset. Even though the logical side of his brain knew exactly why she was upset the anxiety part of his brain was certain that she was mad at him for some reason. It was the way Mike's brain worked and he hated it.

Neither of them spoke a word the entire 7 minute drive. Mike became more and more certain that something was somehow his fault until he was practically buzzing with anxiety. It took everything in him to not pull over and throw up. He hoped she didn't notice how nervous he was since it was such a stupid reason. Jane seemed pretty focused on the view out the window so it was possible she didn't notice.

When they got to Benny's they took one of the 2 person tables by the window. It seemed both of them went quite often since neither of them needed to look at the menu to know what they wanted. A waitress came quickly to get them water and take their order before they were left alone again.

Mike took a quick drink of water to cure his dry throat. "So what happened?"

"Do I have to talk about it?"

"You don't *have* to." He said, "I'll just leave you here if you don't."

A small smile spread on her face. "Funny."

"I thought so."

Jane picked at the napkin underneath her silverware, still prolonging talking about the fight. "She thinks I'm keeping secrets from her."

"Are you?"

"I guess so." Jane deflated slightly in her seat. "There's this guy I've been talking to for a while and I never really tell her anything about him. She's mad because she thinks I'm not telling her about my boyfriend, but I'm not dating him."

Mike raised an eyebrow at her across the table, thoroughly confused. "So why don't you talk to her about him?"

"Because we talk about really private stuff. Stuff I don't tell Max about." She explained. "Not because I don't want her to know but because I'm embarrassed to tell her. And, I don't know, I don't feel embarrassed talking to him about that stuff. Plus he just... gets me."

"Do you think Max would judge you?"

"No, no, it's not that." Jane said. "It's just that it's kind of... heavy stuff. And I don't want to bother or burden her. She already has enough to put up with me." she leaned back in her chair, her posture giving away how uncomfortable she was. "Plus I talk to him over text. It's hard to talk about that stuff in person."

All Mike could think of was Virgo. "Yeah, I know what you mean."

Jane's face lit up. "You do?" she asked. "Do you talk to someone like that?"

Mike felt his stomach twist into a tight, nervous knot. Jane had clearly gone out of her comfort zone by sharing part of her life with him. Did he want to do the same? Clearly things with her and her boy were different than Mike and Virgo since they talked over text. He would sound like an old man if he said he and Virgo exclusively used email.

"No, not really." he ended up saying. "But I get what you're saying. Sometimes you just don't wanna tell your loved ones about what's going on in your head. You don't wanna let them down."

"Yeah, exactly." she agreed. "And I know that if I tell them they'll just worry about me when they don't have to."

"And it doesn't matter how much you say they don't have to, right?"

"Exactly!" Jane threw her hands up in the air. "If I didn't know any better I'd say you're the one I'm talking to."

What if Jane was Virgo?

As soon as the thought entered Mike's mind he pushed it right back out. There were things that lined up. Plus she clearly knew who she was talking to since she said 'if I didn't know any better'. Not to mention Jane's sister, something the whole town knew about since it was the reason she moved to Hawkins in the first place. There was no way Virgo would leave out something that big. Especially since she had explicitly cited her parents divorce as the start of her depression.

"Wouldn't that be something?" Mike asked. "It's a small world, but I doubt it's that small."

"Hawkins is." she countered.

"True. Does he live in Hawkins?"

"Not quite."

Mike wasn't sure what she meant by that, but he didn't dwell on it since the waitress came over and brought their food.

While they ate they talked about anything other than Jane's fight with Max. She asked him about photography and how he got into it and told stories of the kind of things she missed during rehearsal on days he wasn't there. He wouldn't have thought it the first time he met her but Jane was pretty funny. And she appreciated his stupid sense of humor.

"I'm glad you don't think I'm being stupid about this." Jane said in between french fries.

"I never said I didn't think you were being stupid."

Her jaw dropped and she stared at him from across the table. "I thought you understood?"

"I do understand." Mike clarified, "But that doesn't mean I don't think Max is right. Yeah, it's hard to talk about this stuff with your friends

sometimes. But that's what friends are for. You just gotta suck it up and do it, you know?"

Jane made a face at him. "Oh, because you're *so* open and honest with your friends."

"It's a work in progress, I'll admit."

She rolled her eyes at him. "You're a hypocrite."

"Which is exactly why I think you should tell your *best friend* about what's going on in your life. She clearly cares."

She threw a french fry at him, but it landed harmlessly on his plate before he ate it. "I'd like to see you try it."

"Okay, fine." Mike said, leaning back in the booth. "What do you wanna know?"

Jane raised an eyebrow at him. "What?"

"You can ask me anything you want, and I'll answer, and then when you get home you're gonna call Max you'll tell her about this guy."

She narrowed her eyes at him as she likely thought about what to ask him and Mike found himself regretting his offer. What if he was forced to tell her something completely embarrassing? Mike wasn't a fan of lying, but there was only so much about himself he was willing to open up about.

"Do you think it's impossible to fall in love with someone you've never met before?"

"Yes?"

"Why?"

Mike wasn't expecting a follow up question.

"You can know someone well enough to fall in love with them without meeting them in person. I have a cousin who's been dating someone that lives in Scotland for 3 years and they've only met twice."

It's just different, you know?"

"Different how?" she asked, then added "In your opinion."

Mike shifted in his seat, unsure how exactly to put what he was thinking into words. He figured it was good practice if he ever had to have a similar conversation with Will about Virgo. "Well when you talk to someone you don't see in person the only thing you can really do is talk. There's no distraction with all the physical stuff that comes with dating, which means you get to know someone on a really deep level quicker. At least I think." Mike raised an eyebrow at her. "Do you think you're in love with this guy?"

He saw her face flush as red as the leather on the booths. "I don't know. Maybe."

"What's his name?"

"Jack."

Mike mentally crossed Jane's name off the list of possible Virgo candidates.

"If you don't tell Max about Jack I'll never give you a ride again."

Jane dramatically deflated. "God, how will I ever live?"

"Not my problem."

She rolled her eyes at him and kicked his foot under the table.

They stayed at Benny's for another half an hour before they got in the car and headed to Jane's house. Despite the fact that they seemingly had nothing in common their conversation flowed fairly easily. They talked about school without either of them bringing up college. Jane told him stories about the kind of antics that went on during rehearsal that Mike either wasn't there to see or was totally oblivious to and he told her about the kind of teachers she could expect to have next year.

Mike wondered if Jane Hopper was going to be one of the most unlikely friends he ever made. If she was he didn't think he'd mind.

5. Virgo: The Call

Thank you everyone once again for reading and leaving such nice reviews! So many people have been asking me if they're going to find out who they really are at some point, and although I don't usually like to spoil *anything* I will say that they will figure it out eventually. That's all I'll say on that! Enjoy :)

Leo,

Have you ever told any of your friends about me? Normally I wouldn't ask you something like that but I just got in a fight with my best friend and it was kind of about you.

I know I promised I would be more honest with people in my life about my mental health but I haven't really lived up to that promise. I was going to start off slow before I got into explaining you and everything you've helped me through but I kind of ran out of time.

My best friend figured out that I've been talking to someone for a little while and she's always respected my privacy and the fact that it's something I don't really want to talk about (not because of anything you've done, but because if I told her about you I'd have to tell her about everything I tell you). But she all of a sudden got really upset about the fact that I don't tell her about someone I obviously talk to so often. It just came out of nowhere.

I understand why. I'm kind of private about a lot of things and I know that best friends tell each other everything. But I can't help it. I feel like if I tell her what's really going on in my head she'll get scared and leave me. I'm kind of scared you'll do the same thing if you get to know me any better.

A friend of mine thinks I should just suck it up and tell her. What do you think?

Virgo.

Virgo,

You can ask me anything you want.

I told my best friend about you but that's pretty much it. And I only told him because he was looking at something on my phone once when you sent me an email. I know exactly what you mean. I would never be embarrassed about you so that's definitely not it. I just feel like what we have is something difficult to understand unless you're in it.

I think you're friend is right. She's only upset because she cares about you and wants to make sure you're okay. She's probably just frustrated. Think about how you would feel if she all of a sudden got really closed off and only told you a fraction of what was really going on with her.

You don't have to tell her anything you're uncomfortable with sharing but I do think you should tell her something. She's your best friend for a reason, you clearly trust her.

I would be offended that you genuinely think you're gonna scare me off if I wasn't afraid of the same thing. I know there's not much I can say that will change your mind but I promise that won't happen.

Leo

Jane spent the entire hour and a half before Max came over pacing the house. She and her best friend had never gotten in a fight before. Never in a million years did she think she thought the first one would be about Leo.

She wondered if she was finally getting a glimpse of what his life with anxiety was like. Her palms were sweaty and her heart was pounding in her chest, and at any moment she felt like she could throw up. Her nerves were so strong they were practically making her vibrate. She was torn between wanting to call and cancel and wanting to get it over with so she wouldn't have to worry about it any more. Jane made a mental note to send Leo a message telling him she was even more sympathetic to what he had to go through than usual.

When she heard the familiar ringing of Max's engine pulling up in

front of her house Jane wiped her sweaty palms on her jeans before heading out the front door to meet her. She tried her best to read Max's expression as she came up the walkway but it was impossible.

"I made you French toast." Jane blurted once Max finally reached her. They were constantly in a debate about the superior breakfast food; French toast or waffles.

Max's stone cold expression wavered slightly as she allowed herself a small smile. "You're admitting defeat after two years?"

"Temporary defeat." Jane corrected. "But yes You being happy is more important than me being right."

Jane could tell her words shocked her by the look on her face. Max stared at her for a moment or two before her smile grew just a bit and she let herself inside and headed straight for the kitchen. Sitting on the kitchen table were two plates of French toast, syrup, and utensils. They sat across from each other and started cutting into their breakfast, neither of them quite sure what to say. Jane knew she would likely have to start the conversation. She just didn't know how.

"Mike told me I should suck it up and tell you." she eventually said, her eyes fixed on her plate.

In her peripheral vision she saw Max raise an eyebrow at her. "Mike?"

"Wheeler." she clarified. "He made me talk about it and then gave me a ride home. He thinks I'm being stupid."

"You are being stupid." Max agreed. "Too bad it took your new best friend Wheeler to tell you that."

"Mike is *not* my best friend." Jane said. "You're my best friend. And I'll tell you anything you want to know."

"Anything?"

"Anything?"

Max took another bite of French toast before setting her fork down on the table, setting a serious tone for the conversation instantly.

"What are you telling this guy that you're talking to that you can't tell me?"

Jane squirmed in her seat. Sure, she was opening up. But how much was too much? Max said she wanted to know everything but she likely only said that because she didn't know much. "That I'm depressed. And I don't care about school or college, or anything really."

"Is he depressed too?" Max asked.

She shook her head. "He has anxiety issues. He told me the other day that he takes meds so it must be pretty bad."

"Are you on meds?"

"No."

Max pushed her food around her plate with her fork. Jane could see a thought forming in her mind that she, at least for a moment, didn't want to say. "Do you think you should start taking meds?"

Truthfully Jane hadn't given it much thought. Certainly not at all until Leo brought it up. The chemicals in her brain were clearly messed up enough already. She was scared that adding medication into the mix would just make things worse. She'd heard the side effects on those commercials. She didn't want to take the risk of making things worse than they already were. She didn't think she or anyone else around her could take that.

On the other hand, what if they helped? What if her mind started working the way it had before Sarah got sick? Try as she might to imagine it she couldn't quite wrap her head around it. Plus, she wasn't ready to let go yet. Sarah was everything to her. If she didn't live in Jane's memory then she wouldn't live anywhere.

But Jane could see how badly her dad, Max, and Leo wanted her to get better. She wanted to be the daughter and friend that deserved. Was medication really the answer?

"Maybe I'll ask my dad about it." Jane said, stabbing another piece of French toast onto her fork.

Max raised a red eyebrow at her. "Maybe or definitely?"

"Definitely. Just for you."

Max beamed at her from across the table and Jane knew that at least going for a consultation was the right thing.

"So do you forgive me?" Jane asked, taking that Max hadn't stormed out or started yelling at her as a good sign.

She nodded, "One condition, though."

"What's that?"

"No more keeping secrets from me because you think it's for my own good." Max said. "Let that be my decision."

"Fair enough."

"That includes updates on your boyfriend."

Jane's cheeks flushed bright pink, her gaze instantly dropping down to her half empty plate. "He's not actually my boyfriend, you know."

Max rolled her eyes. "He might as well be, the way you get when you talk about him. All giddy and flustered." She only laughed when Jane's cheeks turned even warmer. "You're gonna have two men fighting over you before you know it."

A crease settled between her brows. "Two men?"

"Mike and Leo."

If Jane had been drinking water she would have spit it out. "Mike?" she repeated, "Since when was Mike an option?"

Max shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know. You tell me."

"Mike is just my friend. If even that, I hardly know him."

"Well why don't you get to know him a little more so you can have some real life romance?"

Jane scoffed at her. "Oh please." She said. "I'll get to know him, but as a friend. I doubt he's interested."

Max pointed a finger at her. "Don't be so sure, Hopper. He's got the eyes."

"The eyes?"

"The eyes that teenage boys get when they notice how pretty a girl is. He's got the eyes bad."

"Whatever."

"You've got the eyes too, you know."

Jane shrugged. "I bet I do. Mike's gorgeous. But he's just a friend."

Would you want to be something more?"

Her first instinct was to say no. Not when Leo was still in the picture as a possibility. She wasn't sure if she bought into the whole idea of soulmates. If they were real she thought Leo might be hers. Which sounded completely ridiculous even to her. Before meeting him she would have never thought it was possible to have the connection they did exclusively over email. Was the type of connection she had with him one sided? Perhaps. She was just glad he still wanted to talk to her after so long.

But Jane knew something would have to change eventually. Whether that was taking things further with Leo or moving on to someone else she could have an in person connection with it was clear that things couldn't last the way they were forever. Just the thought made her heard pound. Things with Leo were amazing. But all good things came to an end.

"Why don't I get better first before I worry about a boyfriend?" Jane said finally.

"Spoken like a feminist icon." Max agreed. "In the meantime why don't you hang out with Mike a little more? Best case scenario you two get married. Worst case scenario it's awkward when he's at rehearsal."

"I don't know."

"My neighbors across the street are having a part this weekend." Max told her. "I wasn't going to go but you could invite him. You guys can get warm and cozy on the dance floor."

"What happened to being a feminist icon?"

"Stop deflecting and say you'll invite him."

Jane glared at her, which only seemed to amuse Max rather than threaten her. "Fine." She agreed, "I'll invite him."

"Good. You're officially forgiven."

Max pulled her phone out and played music while they ate the rest of their food. Max was into older punk music that Jane certainly didn't mind but probably wouldn't listen to without her. The conversation moved to the more mundane things of life and Jane felt a weight lifted off her shoulders that she and her best friend were back to normal. She had no idea what she would have done without her. She was at the sink rinsing off their dishes when she heard a phone buzz on the table, followed by a gasp from Max.

"You got an email."

Jane whipped around to face her, her defensive instincts kicking in before she remembered everything she'd just told Max about Leo. She'd have to get used to keeping him a secret. She wiped her wet hands off on a towel and hurried back over to Max, her stomach already filling up with butterflies.

"Read it out loud."

Her cheeks flushed red but she complied

"Virgo-"

"Virgo?"

She looked up from her phone. "We use our zodiac signs as pennames." She explained, the first of many things she would realize

she forgot to mention.

Max's eyes went wide with shock. "Leo isn't even his real name?"

"Do you want to hear the email or not?"

She took her silence as a yes.

"Virgo,

My day has been an absolute shit show.

Me and my sisters got some bad news and my house is in chaos. My older sister has been fighting with my parents all morning and my baby sister locked herself in her room and won't come out. Everyone's offering me 'anything I need' but they can't give it to me. What I need is your voice telling me all the things you know will calm me down because right now words on a screen aren't enough.

The reason I haven't called you is because I'm scared if you know me any better than you already do you won't want to talk to me anymore and I don't think I'd be able to take that. But I don't care anymore. I need you."

Jane typed her reply faster than she'd ever typed anything in her life.

Don't be scared. I'm here. Call me.

She looked up from her phone and at Max across the table. Her open mouth-wide eyed expression of shock might have made Jane laugh if her stomach hadn't sunk all the way down to the center of the earth.

Her mind was running wild with possibilities at what could be wrong. She was all too familiar with family related bad news. Would she finally have to tell him about Sarah?

She didn't care. She'd do it. She would do anything for him.

"Are you nervous to talk to him?" Max asked her.

Jane nodded. "Stay with me?"

Max reached across the table and took Jane's hands in hers. "If you put it on speaker I'll be silent."

"Deal."

They both sat and stared at Jane's phone for what felt like an eternity. She was practically buzzing in her chair. She was going to talk to him. Hear his voice. Get an instant response. Holy shit.

She and Max both jumped out of their skin when her phone started to ring with an unknown number. Normally she would have let it ring once or twice so she didn't seem too eager. But she was eager. And worried. And she wanted him to know. She snatched her phone off the table, answering it and putting it on speakerphone, then taking a shaky breath.

"Hello?"

"Virgo?"

"Leo?"

"Hi." Off the bat it was difficult to describe his voice other than shaky and nervous. Maybe tearful. "Is the signal okay? I gave my phone to my sister to get her to come out of my room so I'm on the home phone in the basement."

"The signal's fine." She said, "Are you okay?"

"No. Not really. This is helping, though. You have a nice voice."

No she didn't. Hearing her own voice made every atom of her existence cringe.

Leo had a nice voice. It was soft but low, and almost familiar. He had the kind of voice for acting. Or recording songs to be played on record players.

"Don't deflect." She said, too flustered to acknowledge the compliment. "What's going on? Are you safe?"

"Yeah, yeah, I'm safe." He answered. Leo was speaking so fast that

had she not been paying such close attention she might not have been able to understand him. It was the feeling of anxiety she got from reading his emails amplified a hundred times. "It's just... my parents kind of dropped a bombshell on us today?"

"Which was?"

"They're getting a divorce."

In her peripheral vision Jane saw Max wince. Both girls had gone through the process of a family breaking up and knew full well how difficult it could be. Jane felt her heart break into pieces with the realization that Leo would be going through the same thing. "Jesus, Leo, I'm so sorry."

"Can you tell me about your parents' divorce again? I just- I want to hear you talk."

Jane's face burned bright red and she had to cover her cheeks with her hands. "Okay. She said. "I was fifteen, so it was two years ago. My mom cheated on my dad." She didn't dare look at Max, knowing that she was caught in a lie she'd have to explain later. "She met him through a work business trip in Nashville, which is where she grew up. My dad had kind of a drinking problem, and this other guy had a really bright future so she left."

"Why didn't you want to go with her?"

"I think she's the one who didn't want me to go."

"Jesus, Jane-"

"This isn't about me, remember?"

She heard him sigh. "Okay. Did you talk to your friend?"

"Yeah?"

"And?"

A small, involuntary smile spread on her face. "We're okay. She made me promise to tell her more about what's going on. She also made me

promise to ask my dad about taking me to a psychiatrist."

"Wow."

"Yeah, I know. And, get this, I did homework this morning."

"Get out of town."

"It was math, too. You know how much I hate math."

"I could kiss you right now."

She saw Max's jaw drop open. Jane agreed. *Holy crap.* Leo had been consistently flirting with her ever since they met, that wasn't new. But he'd never been so blunt about it. She managed to shake herself off and come up with a very Virgo-like reply. "I'd make a joke about you being too far away to do it but I didn't see your area code."

"I did that on purpose."

"Why?"

"I didn't want you to see how close I am."

"You must be pretty close."

"I am."

Jane and Max shared a look. *Hoy crap.* What if he was within a days drive? The thought put butterflies in his stomach. "If we're that close then you know we're gonna have to meet one day. You can't keep me away forever."

"I don't intend to. Just for a little while."

"Why?"

"So I can transform into less of a dork before you meet me."

Jane scoffed at him. "Shut up."

"I mean it Virgo. It's easy to seem cooler over text than you actually are."

"I know, I've been doing it this whole time."

"Shut up. Why do you want to meet me so bad? I know you do and you just don't want to tell me because you think I don't."

He was right. "Do you?"

"Of course. Why?"

"I'm curious."

"About how I look?"

"Maybe."

He laughed. It wasn't even that funny and he laughed. Jane had to lean back in her chair to keep herself grounded so she didn't fly up into the clouds. She was in love with his laugh. Absolutely smitten with it. Someone with such a beautiful laugh had to have been carved from marble. "You're not missing out on anything special."

"Well why don't you meet me and let me decide that for myself."

"You're too smart for me."

6. Leo: The Call

Hi all. Life has been kicking my ass lately, I'm sorry for not uploading that much. I've been working a lot but I think my schedule is gonna calm down soon, then hopefully I'll be more consistent. In the mean time I hope you like this chapter :) and thank you so much for your continued support.

"You're too smart for me." Mike said into the phone.

He meant it. Virgo was too good to be true. And her *voice*. She sounded like an angel. Mike had half a mind to snatch his phone from Holly and secretly take a recording of Virgo so he'd be able to listen to her voice later on. But that seemed creepy so he ultimately decided against it.

"Stop doing that thing you always do when you're talking about something hard." She chastised him. "What's going on with your parents?"

Mike groaned and resumed pacing the length of his basement. "I don't want to talk about them. I want to listen to you talk."

"I'll talk about anything you want me to if you tell me what happened." She said. "I don't like seeing you upset but I don't know to help you if you don't tell me what's going on."

"I'm not upset. I'm shocked."

"Why?"

"I never thought they'd actually do it." Mike explained, picking at the cuticle on his thumb, one of his many nervous ticks. "Me and my older sister thought they were going so split when I was around ten. Then next thing we knew my mom was pregnant. I know this sounds horrible but I think she was an accident and they decided to make it work for a little while."

"That doesn't sound awful at all. It sounds realistic. How are you

feeling about it?"

"I don't really care. My dad's an asshole and my mom's got no backbone. I'm just worried about my sisters."

"You're such a good person, Leo."

Mike. He wanted so badly to hear what his name would sound like on Virgo's tongue. But he had to remind himself that given their close proximity she could know exactly who he was if he said his name. He wasn't ready for that.

She must have sensed that he wasn't sure how to reply since she continued without him saying anything. "I think my dad went out with his secret girlfriend again yesterday. He said he was working late but when he came home he wasn't in his work clothes."

A smile spread on Mike's face. He loved hearing updates about the more mundane non-mental health related parts of Virgo's life. Her dad's secret girlfriend was a never-ending saga. "Have you confronted him about it yet?"

"Sort of. I asked him why he was dressed so nice when he got home and he said he had to make stop on the way back. He's such a shit liar."

"You should follow him when you think he's gonna meet her or something."

"Nah, I don't think so."

"Why not? I'm dying to find out as much as you are."

"I don't wanna catch my dad making out with some woman."

"Gross."

"You're telling me."

xXx

By Monday Mike wasn't feeling much better. His mind was a constant

tornado of worries for his family. Would he have to move? Would Holly have to change schools? Would Nancy stay in Hawkins with Johnathan if they left? Who would get the house? Would they sell it and get their own places? Did they ever love each other?

He wasn't much better on Wednesday. His friends were helping. So were Nancy and Holly. And Virgo, of course. Her voice echoed in his ears constantly. And her *laugh*. Did she ever laugh like that any of his emails? He was seriously missing out all that time if that were the case.

Mike felt like he was on autopilot the whole week. So it was safe to say he was thankful that there was a three day weekend coming up for parent-teacher conferences. He and his friends decided to go to the play rehearsal on Wednesday so they could go straight home the next day and be free until Monday. But as Mike stood in the back row in front of his camera and standing next to Will he was hardly able to focus on much other than the fact that they were trying on the prototype costumes and Jane looked absolutely ridiculous. Even from the back row they could hear Max laughing.

"You're staring." Will pointed out.

He was. There was no point in denying it. "She's 80 feet away. She won't notice."

"She'll notice the holes your eyes are putting in her back."

Mike laughed. That was one of the things that had gotten easier.

"I'm gonna go to the bathroom for a second." Will said, pushing himself off the wall. "Mess with the focus a little bit so you can say you got something done."

"Yes sir."

Over the years his friends had learned the best way to help Mike when he was going through something was to pretend like he wasn't unless he explicitly asked them to do otherwise. It gave him a sense of normalcy when everything else was complete madness. Especially when they busted his chops like he wasn't something that needed to

be handled with kid gloves.

When Mike looked up from his camera on its tripod he didn't expect to see Jane making her way up the aisle, holding onto her skirt that was too long for her legs. A dark brown colonial style dress unbuttoned and over her black jeans and tank top was definitely a strange look, and he guessed it was even stranger if she were wearing the bonnet she had clutched in her hand.

"My sister was looking for a dress just like that." Mike said when she finally reached him. "Where did you get it."

"Ye old shoppe down the street." She said sarcastically. "I didn't think this would be my style, but this might be my new everyday look."

"With the shirt and jeans underneath?"

"Oh absolutely." Jane agreed. "Hey, so, I took your advice about Max."

Mike raised an eyebrow at her. "I really hope you're not bringing this up to tell me it blew up in your face and now you have to take your revenge on me somehow."

Jane laughed. "No. Kind of the opposite actually." She told him. "I think things are better than they were before."

"That's awesome!"

"Yeah, it is. Thanks to you."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Well I don't know about all that." Mike said. He just gave her the advice, he didn't actively do anything to resolve the situation.

"Well either way I wanted to say thank you." Jane hesitated, glancing sideways at the stage and probably at Max whose red hair Mike could see even from the opposite side of the auditorium. "So I wanted to invite you a party. And your friends too, of course, if they want to come."

The P word sent a spark of panic into Mike's chest. Having as many

people as possible crammed into one living room, all of them drunk and making poor choices they wouldn't normally, was not Mike's idea of a fun night. Plus there was always drama at parties that was the talk of the town all week. And frankly he couldn't care less about who cheated on who and who got arrested for drunk driving. Big house parties weren't his scene at all.

But it was the perfect opportunity to be out of the house all night, which he figured he couldn't pass up. Ever since his parents broke the news being at home was suffocating. Mike could only breathe when he was in the basement, his room, or Nancy's room. And even then, it didn't come easy. Getting drunk at a party would not only give him the excuse to get out of the house, but it would give him the excuse to spend the night at Will's.

Plus he'd promised Virgo he would try harder to put himself out there. And he had told her he'd go to a party if she got better at her homework. He didn't plan on breaking his promises to her.

Not only that but he felt like he couldn't say no to Jane. He could tell that she, for whatever reason, was nervous about inviting him. And he respected people that did things regardless of the fact that it made them nervous. It wasn't something Mike excelled at. And it didn't help that Jane looked kind of cute when she was nervous, which he didn't plan on repeating out loud to anyone.

"Yeah, sure." Mike finally said. "As long as your dad gives me a break if he busts the party because I gave you such good advice."

"If he busts the party he'll be too busy being mad at me to worry about anyone else." She said.

"I'll come visit you in jail if it's any consolation."

"Only if you smuggle me a nail file so I can break out."

"Deal." Mike said. He was beginning to wonder what Jane was like when she was drunk. Was she secretly a party girl that would dance on tables and lose her voice from yelling? Or was she a flirty drunk that would go after every mildly attractive guy? The thought made Mike's stomach sour in a way he didn't like and couldn't explain.

"When's the party?"

"Tomorrow night, on Cherry Street." She told him. "I only know about it because they're Max's neighbors."

Mike nodded. "Are you gonna wear this?"

Jane looked down at her dress and jeans, a large grin spreading on her face. When she smiled he could see two of her teeth that stuck out more than the others. "You know, I'm tempted but I don't think I will. I think I'll save it for a special occasion."

"Like falsely accusing townspeople of witchcraft?"

"Exactly." She looked back at the stage to find that they were gearing up to practice another scene. "I should get back to being afflicted. Very important work, you know."

"I wouldn't want to keep you from it." Mike assured her.

She gave him one last smile, this one a bit shyer, before she headed back towards the stage. She wasn't gone for very long before Mike's phone buzzed with a text from Dustin; ***come to the classroom.***

Mike packed up the camera and tripod before heading back to the classroom in the wing next to the one the auditorium was in. He was anticipating his friends to tell him that one of the cameras broke or that something else went horribly wrong. His palms started getting clammy and his heart started to pound with anticipation the closer to the room he got. By the time he got to the classroom and saw his friends sitting on desks he was a nervous wreck.

"What's up?" he asked, setting the camera and tripod down on a table.

"You agreed to go to a party?" Lucas asked, "Knowing that it's a party?"

"Were you spying on my conversation?"

Will began to look guilty. "I came back from the bathroom and didn't want to interrupt. Then I heard you say you'd go and I was surprised."

Mike shrugged, sitting on top of the desk next to his things. "I've been to parties before."

"We had to trick you into going to one." Dustin reminded him. "But all she has to do is bat her eyes and you're on the guest list."

"First of all, there was no eye batting." Mike corrected. "Second of all if you think I agreed just because Jane asked me then that's not true. I agreed to go because I don't wanna be at home any longer than I have to. It's been rough there."

"Which is exactly why we're surprised you're going." Will said. "Things are hard enough, and you know how you get at parties sometimes. We just don't want you to get reckless because of your family."

Since he had just gotten so defensive about her Mike couldn't admit that Jane did have something to do with why he'd agreed to go. He also couldn't admit, especially not in front of Dustin and Lucas, that Virgo was a big part of why he'd agreed.

The longer he knew Virgo the more he wanted to improve himself so he could be the kind of person she'd want to meet. Because, although she thought differently, he wanted to meet her so badly. Mike knew that if he ever gathered the courage to meet her, and it went well, he would ask her out. He didn't need to know what she looked like to know that she was the perfect match for him. No one could make him feel the way Virgo did.

Which was why he felt so guilty about the little things he noticed about Jane. Or the way his stomach did a backflip when he saw her walking towards him. Virgo was the girl for him and he knew it without a doubt. Yet Jane had some kind of effect on him he never expected when he almost knocked her over with his tripod. He felt so stuck. On one hand he and Virgo had a crazy connection. She knew things about him that no one else did, and vice versa. Jane, on the other hand, knew him as the photography nerd and was still interested in him. As a friend, yes. But it was still interest.

He could tell his friends were waiting for him to respond while he went down a mental wormhole. "I'll be fine." He assured them, "And

even if I freak out anything's better than being home right now."

They seemed to figure that he'd made up his mind since they didn't question him any further. That is until Mike and Will were alone in the car. He knew that once it was just the two of them the conversation would pick back up. Will didn't even wait until they were off the school property.

"So why did you really agree to go?" he asked, "Besides what's going on at home?"

Mike sighed, drumming his fingers nervously on the steering wheel.
"Okay, so maybe it has a little to do with Jane."

"Obviously." Wil said. "Why else?"

"It had more to do with Virgo." He admitted. "I just... I wanna live up to her expectations of me. She thinks I can be fine at a party so I'm gonna try. She's just so..." he threw one of his hands in the air "perfect! And her voice, Jesus Will, she's got the most beautiful voice I've ever heard."

"And you're *sure* you didn't recognize it?"

Mike shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know, man." He said. "You know how people sound different on the phone than they do in real life."

"Yeah but don't you think you'd recognize such a *beautiful* voice anywhere?" Will pointed out

"I thought so."

He was silent for a moment. "Jane has a nice voice."

"Come on."

"I'm serious, she does. The lower and sexy kind, like Marilyn Monroe."

Mike laughed, "Didn't you come out 2 years ago?"

"I'm not saying *she's* sexy." Will corrected, "I'm saying that I could see how a straight guy, like you, could think her voice is."

He shook his head. "I think what you're *really* trying to say is that you think Jane is Virgo."

"Wasn't the whole reason she and Max got in a fight was because she had some guy she wasn't telling her about?" Will asked. "Kind of like how you don't tell Dustin and Lucas about Virgo?"

"Yes, but it doesn't fit." Mike told him. "She knows his name. Jack, or something like that. Plus it just doesn't make sense for Jane to be Virgo."

"Why?"

"She would have told me if she had a sister that died." Mike said. "That's just something you don't leave out. Especially when she can talk to me, and has talked to me, about everything."

Will shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know. I don't think Jane talks about it. Ever." He looked over at him. "You know how my mom is friends with her dad?"

"I know that they're probably dating, yeah."

"Whatever." Will said. "Well apparently she's been having a hard time lately. He asked my mom who she went to get her meds from during the divorce." He raised an eyebrow. "Didn't Virgo say she'd ask her dad about taking meds?"

"Yeah."

The more Will talked the more similarities between Jane and Virgo Mike discovered. Like how their dads were both secretly dating someone. And they both didn't seem to be excited to be in the school play. And they both got into fights with their best friends, around the same time, about keeping a relationship a secret.

But despite all of the similarities Mike knew in his heart that it wasn't Jane. When he dialed Virgo's number on the home phone it wasn't familiar. And the thing about her sister didn't add up. Virgo said her

parents divorced because her mom cheated. That was a long way from the death of her little sister breaking up the family.

Jane wasn't Virgo. Which made it even worse that he was starting to catch feelings for her.

7. Virgo: The Party

welcome to part 274857 of I havent updated in forever. I can explain! I went from working 1 day a week to 6 so needless to say I've been very busy. But I'm back to 1 so hopefully I'll be uploading more consistently! (though knowing me that's not very likely). Anyway enjoy!

Also if any of you have seen the Umbrella Academy on netflix I just started a story for that I would love if you checked out :)

"Is that what you're wearing?"

Jane looked down at her outfit. Black jeans with rips at the knees, sneakers, and a grey t shirt certainly wasn't the fanciest outfit she owned. But she was going to a house party, not prom. She looked up at Max, ready to make a comment on her clothes before she realized that she'd gone to the bathroom to change. The high waisted jeans and bralette she had on under a jean jacket looked a lot nicer than what Jane was wearing.

"I thought so." She replied, leaning back in the chair at Max's desk. "but I'm guessing you're gonna tell me that I should change."

"You guessed right." Max said, heading over to her dresser and opening up the second drawer from the top. "Just because you're dead set on being just friends With Wheeler doesn't mean you can't show a little more skin. I'll even pick something black to fit your whole theme."

Max quickly found a black short sleeve crop top that she threw at Jane before telling her to go change. Jane obeyed despite the fact that crop tops weren't really her thing. She was always telling Leo he needed to get out of his comfort zone more often and she figured she needed to take her own advice every once in a while. Once she changed she stood in front of the mirror in Max's bathroom and surveyed herself.

What would Leo think when he realized she, someone he thought was

so fantastic and amazing, was so plain?

Jane yanked out her ponytail and shook out her curls in hopes of making herself look a bit more exciting. It didn't work. With a frustrated sigh she pulled out her phone and typed up an email.

Leo,

Ever since you told me that you know we live close to each other because of my area code I've been going crazy wondering if we've ever met without knowing it? How insane would it be if we went to school together? Imagine if in person we hated each other.

I don't know if we live close enough to go to school together since you won't tell me where you're from. Which you should. I know you're scared to meet me because you think I won't like you as much in person. I'm going to be really blunt and tell you that you should suck it up. Don't you think I'm scared of the same thing? Of course I am! But I still want to meet you because you're really important to me.

Sometimes I feel like you just don't want to meet me.

I'm going to a party tonight on Cherry Street in Hawkins. If you're close enough to know about it you should go. Maybe going to a party will be easier if you know I'm there.

Virgo

Jane's heart was pounding. What had gotten into her that she was suddenly so bold? That was usually his job.

What if he was going to the party? What if they bumped into each other? What if he got drunk and started flirting with girls? What if she was one of those girls?

The thought of Leo flirting with her in person made every inch of skin on her body warm so she quickly cut that train of thought short and went back into Max's room.

"Can you straighten my hair?" she asked, sitting back down at the desk.

Max sat up on her bed. "Sure." She said, coming over and plugging in her flat iron. "What's the occasion?"

"You said I should look nice, right?" Jane pointed out.

She shrugged. "Yeah, I guess. I more meant not dressing like you just rolled out of bed. Mike won't be able to keep his hands off you now, you know."

Jane rolled her eyes. "That's not why I want it straight." She said. "I told Leo I was going to be at the party. I figured if he's close enough that he doesn't want me to see his area code he might be close enough to be at the party."

In the reflection of the mirror she saw Max raise an eyebrow. "That's crazy."

"Yeah." She agreed.

"But... if he won't let you see what area code he's in do you think he'll be willing to meet you at a party?"

Jane let out a sigh. "No." she said honestly. "I don't. But I'm just feeling kind of frustrated right now. I mean, does he just not like me as much as he says he does?"

Max shook her head. "No way." She said. "He's whipped."

She threw his hands up in the air, careful to avoid the flat iron Max was running through her hair. "Then why? I don't understand! It can't just be that he's scared."

"Maybe it is," Max said, "if he's got issues with anxiety. If he didn't I'd say there had to be something else to it. But I'm thinking that you might have to accept that he's just not ready for that right now."

But when would he be? If he wasn't ready after a year of Jane begging she doubted he ever would be ready. The real question was if Jane was okay with it. It was nothing new for her. But what if he still didn't want to meet her in another 6 months? Or a year? What if Mike really ended up having feelings for her? She'd have to pick between them, she supposed. And though she didn't want to she

knew it would be foolish to turn down a real life relationship for someone who wouldn't even meet her.

Max must have been able to tell she had a lot on her mind because she said "Don't worry about that right now. With or without Leo we're gonna have fun tonight, right? We'll drink, and dance, and you'll flirt with Mike just for the hell of it, and you won't worry about Leo."

Jane wasn't so sure about that part but she smiled at her best friend in the mirror anyway.

xXx

She and Max got to the party on the earlier side and yet it was still in full swing when they walked in the door. Music was playing so loud that the floor was vibrating against her sneakers. The two girls grabbed something to drink and did a lap around the house to see who was there before going out to the backyard. It was hard to jump into a party straight away.

From where they sat outside they could see the party begin to fill up. When would Mike and his friends show up? Would they show up? He'd looked kind of hesitant when she'd asked him. Maybe parties weren't his thing. She didn't blame him. In all honesty they weren't really Jane's ideal way to spend a Friday night either. She was only going because she'd asked him to come. If she hadn't she and Max would be at her house down the street complaining about the noise.

She wasn't just on the lookout for Mike. Jane's eyes were peeled for any sign of Leo inside the house. Which was kind of stupid since there was nothing she could really look for. She didn't even know if he was coming to the party. But, for some reason, she had some kind of gut feeling that he'd be there. Even if he wasn't planning on going she thought that he would change his mind when she told him she would be there. Unless he lived an hour away.

Jane didn't want to think about the possibility that he would choose not to go despite knowing she'd be there. It would break her heart.

"You look like a nervous wreck." Max commented.

She looked down at her legs, bouncing up and down and creaking the wood of the back porch. "Sorry." She mumbled, taking a drink from her cup.

"You gotta put him out of your mind." Max told her. "You have no idea if he's coming or not. And even if he does you're not gonna recognize him the second he walks in the door. Unless he tells you he's coming we should act like he's not."

Max was right. But Jane wasn't ready to admit that he wasn't coming.

A few minutes later her phone buzzing snapped her out of her train of thought and she quickly dug through her pocket to answer it. A smile spread on her face when she saw Mike's name calling her. She lifted her phone to her ear, "Hey."

"Hey." He answered. "We're just walking up to the house. Parking is insane."

Jane stood up and motioned for Max to follow her. "Yeah, I bet." She said. "It was getting bad when we walked here."

"Looks like the whole school's here."

She wondered if that included Leo.

"We just walked in." Mike said as she and Max struggled to make their way to the front door. "I see you guys."

"Okay."

She hung up and searched the crowd for a familiar group of boys. Mike's height gave him an advantage and she was able to spot his head sticking up higher than most of the people in the room. Jane and Max linked arms as they forced their way through the crowd to reach them.

As soon as Mike came fully into view she knew she was going to have a tricky night. He looked *really* nice. Damn him. For some reason, possibility the humidity, his hair had a slight curl to it. Which she wasn't complaining about at all. He had on black jeans, boots, and a baggy striped sweater. But nothing that he wore was as cute as the

smile of relief that appeared on his face when he saw her. Shit.

"Wow." He said when he reached her, having to yell over the music.

"What?"

"Your hair." He commented. "It looks great."

Jane's face flushed bright pink and she self consciously tucked a piece of hair behind her ear. "Thanks." She said, "Max did it."

"She did a good job."

"I am right here, you know." Max, who was still glued to Jane's side, pointed out. His friends all laughed while Mike and Jane went red.

"Sorry."

Max rolled her eyes. "Let's get some drinks in you guys."

Jane only took a few steps towards the kitchen when she heard someone behind her call her name. When she turned around she spotted Will trying to catch up with her.

"Hey." He said once he reached her. "Thanks for inviting us."

"Yeah, sure." Jane said. "My pleasure."

"You know, not to tell Mike's business or anything but I'm kind of surprised he agreed to come. And that he followed through."

She glanced at Mike, who was now in the kitchen with the others. "Really?" she asked, looking back at Will.

"Yeah." He admitted. "I think parties kind of freak him out. A few months ago we pretty much had to trick him into going to one."

Jane raised an eyebrow at him. "Really?"

Will nodded. "We told him it was gonna be a lot smaller than it actually was. We was pissed until we got some drinks in him."

"I probably would be too."

"It was for his own good." Will defended. "We're amazing friends, if I say so myself, but he needs more than us. Like you."

Jane blushed, yet again. "Well he's a great friend, too. I don't see why he doesn't have more already."

Will shrugged. "He never really wanted more." He told her. "He must think you're pretty cool."

"I guess."

"Well, thanks for inviting us." Will walked away, likely oblivious to the way his words affected Jane.

Mike didn't really seem like the loner type. Sure, he and his friends mostly kept to themselves. But he was friendly with her since the day they met. And he'd been to two parties in a matter of months, which was more than Jane could say she'd been to. He didn't act awkward or shy around her. Jane hadn't really noticed just how small his circle was until recently. It didn't make sense at all. Mike was a great guy, why wasn't he incredibly popular.

She needed a drink.

Jane made her way to the kitchen, squeezing past drunken and dancing teens she vaguely recognized from the hallway. Max and the boys were all standing around the drink table, coke red in cups, beer bottles, and a very classic looking bowl of spiked punch. Her eyes lingered on Mike, who seemed to be scanning the crowd for something. Or someone. Did he have a girlfriend he'd never mentioned?

"Looking for someone?" she asked when she finally reached him.

Mike met her eyes and for a moment he looked like he didn't know what to say. For a moment she thought that maybe he was keeping some kind of secret from her, which he was allowed to do of course. But his usual smile reappeared on his face before she could think about the possibility too long. "Yeah, you." He said, then turned towards the drinks on the table. "What are you having?"

"I'll take some of the suspicious punch." She said, picking up a plastic

cup.

Mike picked up the ladle and poured some of the drink. "What do you think is in this?"

She shrugged. "No idea." Jane said, taking a drink and then wincing slightly. "It's strong though."

He looked down at the punch for a moment and she could see him debating whether or not he wanted to take a cup himself. Mike eventually grabbed a cup, filled it, and drank almost the whole thing in one shot.

"Holy shit." Jane said.

Mike shrugged. "I'm trying to catch up with you."

"I had one beer." She told him. "In 45 minutes. That's nowhere near chugging that instant alcohol poisoning potion."

"Okay mom." Mike said sarcastically

Jane punched his arm and took another drink.

8. Leo: The Discovery

This may or may not be the chapter you've all been waiting for.

Also follow my weheartit where I make moodboards for stories I've posted on here when I'm lacking inspiration, under the same username. And enjoy :)

Four drinks in and the anxiety constantly living inside him had a death grip on his heart that prevented him from breathing properly. Mike stumbled into an upstairs bathroom and closed the door behind him before sitting on the toilet with his head between his knees. His mind was moving like a snail thanks to the alcohol he'd drank, but his heart was beating a mile a minute thanks to his anxiety. He felt like his body was melting. Like everything inside him was shutting down.

Mike sucked air in through his nose and out through his mouth as hard as he could, yet he still felt as if his airways were plugged up. The walls of the already small bathroom were closing in on him. He was sure that soon he would run out of air, collapse on the floor, and die the most pathetic death in Hawkins history.

Had he drank too much? He knew he wasn't *technically* supposed to drink while he was taking meds, but he'd always thought he would be able to get away with it if he didn't go too crazy. Would he have to go to the hospital and get his stomach pumped? Would Virgo see him brought out on the stretcher?

Virgo.

She was at the party. She could come up and help him calm down. It would be a really bad first impression to make but, in his drunken state, he didn't care. He needed her.

With shaky hands Mike pulled his phone out of his pocket and went into his email. It took him a second but he eventually found the message when she sent him her number that he'd never had the courage to save. His legs bounced up and down while the line rang

and he waited for her to answer. What if she didn't pick up? What if the music was too loud for her to hear her phone ringing? What if she saw him calling but was too busy making out with some guy to care?

"Mike?"

His eyebrows pulled together. "Who's this?"

"It's Jane. You called me."

"Oh, um..."

"You sound freaked out. Are you okay?"

What was left of his sober brain told him to lie and hang up. But his sober brain wasn't in control, and hadn't been for almost two hours. "I'm having a panic attack."

"Where are you?"

"In the bathroom upstairs."

"I'm coming."

Mike dropped his head back between his knees when she hung up. He must have been *really* drunk to call Jane instead of Virgo. Will was getting into his head too much. Mike hadn't dared to mention to him that Virgo said she'd be at the party, knowing that he'd be bombarded with theories.

His head was still between his knees and he was still struggling to breath when the door cracked open and Jane came in and sat on the edge of the tub across from him. She didn't say anything for a while, didn't ask what happened or what she could do. Jane just ran her fingers through his hair, which was really nice except for the fact that Mike was the type of person that cried when someone showed him affection when he was upset. He struggled so much to keep the sound of him crying to a minimum that he eventually gave up.

"Mike?"

He sniffled in response.

Jane slid off the tub and sat on the floor, putting her hands on both his knees. "Can you look at me?"

He didn't want to, but the way she said it sounded like Virgo. All quiet and soft and caring, like her words were meant for him and no one else in the world. Mike picked his head up just enough to look at her. He'd never seen her late enough in the day that her eyeliner had completely worn off. It made his eyes look really big.

"What happened?"

"I don't know." He admitted. "I just... kind of freaked out. All of a sudden I couldn't breathe."

"Does that happen a lot?"

Mike nodded.

Jane grabbed a tissue from the counter next to the sink and wiped both his cheeks. Her touch was grounding for his out of control mind. "Do you wanna go outside and walk around for a little bit? The walk might help."

He sat up straight and attempted to take a deep breath. "Yeah okay." He agreed.

When he stood up she linked her arm with his, though he wasn't sure if that was to comfort him or to keep him from falling. She stayed close to his side as they wove through the crowds of party goers and made their way to the front door. Jane was right, the fresh air helped. As soon as the crisp April air went into his lungs he felt his mind clear just a little bit. They walked about a block before Jane pulled him to a house with a yellow porch and sat next to him on the front steps. Close enough that they're legs touched.

"How'd you get so good at calming people down?" he asked her to break the silence. Mike was still too embarrassed to look directly at her so he kept his eyes fixed on the yard in front of them.

"I have a friend that has anxiety." She told him, then hesitated for a second before continuing. "And my sister got really anxious after she got sick."

"Oh." Mike said. "Yeah." He wondered why, if what Will had said was true about her not talking about her sister, she was telling him about her. He didn't mind, of course. He was just curious.

"Sorry." She said. "I know it's not a fun topic."

Mike shook his head. "No, no, it's fine." He said. "I just feel like it's kind of lame to say sorry or anything like that. It doesn't do anything, you know?"

Jane smiled. "It is a little lame," she admitted, "but it's still appreciated."

"Okay. Sorry."

"It's okay." She rested her head against the railing next to her. "I hope Max doesn't come home and see us here by ourselves."

Mike looked back at the house behind them, which he assumed was Max's. "Why?"

"She thinks you have a thing for me."

His face instantly went beet red. Was he that obvious that even her friends were starting to notice? He really needed to tone it down. "My friends think you have a thing for me."

"Really?"

"Yeah." Mike said. "Maybe they're onto something."

"Maybe."

He looked over at her, raising his eyebrows. In his drunken state it was difficult to read her expression to see if she was kidding or not. He hoped she wasn't. "Really?"

Jane sighed. "I don't know. It's complicated, Mike. Really complicated."

He turned on the step to face her. "Because of that guy you didn't want to tell Max about?" she nodded. "You like him?"

He's really special." She said. "But being with him wouldn't be easy."

"If it helps I don't think I'm much easier."

Jane laughed and kicked his foot. "You're easier. By a long shot. I just don't know."

He was too drunk to keep up. "What's so difficult about him?"

"It's not *him* that's difficult." She explained. "And maybe it's just me, but we have this insane connection. He just really gets me, everything about me. And I tell him everything. It's just so easy to talk to him."

"I'm not seeing the hard part."

Jane sighed. "The hard part is that we've never met. I've only heard his voice once. I have no idea what he looks like. Hell, I don't even know his name."

Mike's eyebrows came together. "I thought his name was Jack or something."

She shrugged. "I lied. I was embarrassed. I thought it would sound stupid to say I only know him by his pen name."

"What's his pen name?"

"Leo."

Jane's words were like a punch in the stomach that completely knocked the wind out of him. His hands gripped the stair he sat on as his head started to spin in an attempt to keep himself grounded. It didn't work.

His mind did the best it could to make the connection after chugging 4 drinks, which required a bit of extra effort. The girl he'd been talking to and dreaming of for a year and a half was right next to him. They'd gone to lunch together. She'd been in his car. They were friends. And she was struggling to pick between the two sides of him. Jane was Virgo.

He felt her hand land on his shoulder. "Hey, you okay? You don't look so good."

"Yeah, I just got dizzy."

"I'm sorry for talking about him so much." She said. "You probably don't wanna hear it."

"Jane-"

"I didn't mean to make it sound like I don't like you." Jane told him. "I do. I think you're great, Mike. I mean, you're such a great friend. And you make me laugh. And I like the way you make me feel. But I just can't get this other guy out of my head."

He put his hand on top of hers, turning to face her. "Jane, stop." he said, "I'm Leo."

She stared at him, her eyes wide and confused and her mouth hanging open slightly. She didn't say anything at first and for a moment he worried she was going to pull away and break his heart. That was something he wouldn't be able to take. When she did finally speak she didn't seem any less shocked. "No, you're not."

"Yeah, I am." He said. "Over the weekend when I called you about my parents I told you that you should follow your dad to see who his girlfriend was, but you said you didn't want to see them making out. You're only doing the school play because the guidance counselor told you you needed it for your applications. I told you I would help you study because I want you to pass but I also didn't want to upset you so I didn't call you out when you didn't send me the study material."

Jane blinked at him, her eyes beginning to get teary, before she threw her arms around his neck and practically crawled into his lap. Mike locked his arms around her waist and buried his face in her straightened hair. He always wondered what kind of perfume she wore. Vanilla with a hint of patchouli.

"Holy shit." Jane said, "It's you."

"It's me."

"You have no idea how guilty I felt." She told him, her voice muffled by his shirt. "Thinking I was cheating on you or something."

"Yeah, I do."

She picked her head up and wiped her cheeks off with her sleeves. The way she looked at him made his stomach do a backflip. "I'm sorry about your parents, Mike."

"It's okay. I'm sorry about yours."

"It's okay." She said. "Do you wanna go inside? I don't care about the stupid party anymore."

Mike let out a sign of relief. "Thank god. I only went because you asked me to go."

She held onto his hand as they went into the house, using the spare key in a potted plant next to the front door. She led him to a bedroom in the back, which he guessed was Max's. Mike recognized Jane's backpack sitting on the floor with the shirt she'd worn to school that day on top of it. She'd likely been in that room when she sent him the email telling him she would be at the party. She might have talked about him in that room. His head was spinning a little. Jane sat down on the side of the bed and pulled him down next to her.

"You're still pretty drunk." She said, "Do you want to lay down for a little bit?"

Mike shook his head. "I want to be with you."

"I'm not going anywhere."

"I want to talk to you." Mike corrected. "You've been trying to meet me for over a year and no you want me to go to sleep?"

Jane laughed. She had the most beautiful laugh he'd ever heard. "Well I never expected you to be drunk."

"Me neither." He admitted. "I was planning on magically becoming super suave and sweeping you off your feet."

She raised an eyebrow at him. "Oh yeah? You were?"

"I was. Can I get a rain check?"

She laughed again and stood up from the bed. "I'm getting you some water." She told him, "You're gonna have a killer hangover in the morning and you need to hydrate."

Mike groaned, knowing she was right.

She was only gone for a minute or two and yet Mike still missed her. He already knew that saying goodbye to her later on would be impossible. They had so much in-person time to make up for he wondered if they ever would.

When she came back in the room Mike stood up and took the glass from her, chugging the whole thing in only a few sips. He stepped close enough to wrap his arms around her waist and for her to rest her head on his chest. They fit together perfectly and Mike couldn't help but think it was somewhat of a confirmation they were made for each other.

"Jane?"

She picked her head up. "Yeah?"

"I really want to kiss you."

"Took you long enough."

She put her hands on both his cheeks and stood on her toes so she could reach him. The second her lips touched his Mike felt his mind melt into a puddle on the floor. He was kissing the absolute girl of his dreams. Who he thought might be his soulmate. A part of Mike wished he wasn't drunk so he could be totally clear minded. But he knew there was a chance he might not have had the courage had he been clear minded.

Thanks to the cropped shirt she had on one of Mike's hands was on the bare skin of the small of her back, while the other was tangled in her hair. He could feel her thumbs lightly brushing across both his freckled cheeks. He couldn't believe that Virgo was really there in

front of him. Kissing him. She was a tangible thing he could hold, no longer just a figment of his imagination. He'd never had to wonder what she looked like or how her hand would fit in his or if she would be scared off if she knew how he was in person. She wasn't.

The sound of Jane's phone ringing broke them apart. Mike couldn't help but smile at how bright red her cheeks were, likely matching his own. She pulled her phone out of her pocket and held it up to her ear. "Hello?"

They were still close enough that he could hear Max's voice on the other line. "Did you and Wheeler bail on us?"

"Yeah we did." Jane said. "We're back at your house."

"Are you making out in my room?"

"Yeah we are."

"Is that a joke?"

Jane laughed. "No, I'm being serious."

"What about your email boyfriend?"

"He is my email boyfriend."

"What?"

"Look, I'll tell you tomorrow, okay? Go have fun and make bad choices."

"Same to you sister, as long as they don't involve my bed."

Jane rolled her eyes and hung up the phone and wrapped her arms around his waist. "Maybe we should go somewhere else." She said, "She's gonna be nosy if she comes back and we're still here."

The timing of her question made him wonder if she was planning on making bad decisions involving beds.

"I'm too drunk to drive us anywhere." Mike said. Though the

discovery that Jane was Virgo had sobered him up a bit it definitely wasn't enough to get behind the wheel.

"Do you trust me to drive your car?" Jane asked. "I have a license, I just don't have my own car."

Mike pulled his keys out of his pocket and put them in her hand. "I trust you."

Jane grabbed her things and held onto his hand as they set out to find his car on the crowded street. It was three blocks away, and they took multiple kissing breaks, but they eventually made it. He put her backpack by his feet and kept his hand on her leg as she drove, needing to touch her and feel that she was real.

"Do you know where maple street is?"

Jane nodded. "What's on maple street?"

"My house." He said. "I don't wanna go to yours and take the chance of your dad arresting me."

He didn't think he'd ever get sick of the sound of her laugh. "Fair enough." She said. "But are you sure you're okay going home with everything happening? We don't have to. We can find some place to hang out and go to mine after my dad falls asleep."

Mike shook his head. "I'm sure."

"You're really drunk. Won't you get in trouble?"

"It's fine."

Jane sighed. "Okay, sorry." Her expression turned into a mix of guilt and sheepishness. "I just worry about you a lot."

A smile spread on his face, his eyes glued on her profile and unable to look away. "I know." He told her. "I worry about you too."

"I know."

Mike stared at her for a few blocks, just drinking in the sight of her.

They'd been talking for a year and a half and the whole time they'd lived in the same town. They had talked. They were friends. They were looking for each other at a party they'd gone to together. It was difficult for him to wrap his drunken mind around.

"I need to tell you something." He said in a sudden burst of confidence.

"What's that."

"I love you Jane Hopper."

Jane glanced at him with an ear to ear grin and laced her fingers between his, bringing his hand to her lips and pressing a kiss on his knuckles. "I love you too Mike Wheeler."

9. Virgo: His House

This chapter's a bit on the shorter side but I hope you enjoy nonetheless! Thanks as always for your continued support on this and any other of my stories.

She was going to his house. *Holy shit.*

As they walked up the walkway to Mike's front door she kept her arm wrapped around his waist to keep him upright. He didn't seem too bothered by the possibility of getting in trouble for coming home drunk but she was. Jane looked up at the windows of the house and wondered which one was his bedroom. The place where he'd likely sent her at least one email every day.

The front door was unlocked and Mike pushed it open with ease. The front hallway alone was much homier than the entire ranch house she shared with her dad. School pictures of Mike and who she assumed were his sisters lined the staircase. The wallpaper was dated but in a charming sort of way. Like she could tell it had been up since his parents likely first bought the house. The wallpaper in Jane's house was definitely dated but it was *not* cute.

"Michael?" a woman's voice called from down the hall. "Is that you?"

"Yeah" he called back, not sounding too thrilled. Jane guessed it was his mother.

"I thought you were spending the night at Will's house."

"Plans changed."

Jane heard footsteps coming down the hall before a woman appeared in the doorway on the opposite end. She was surprised by how much Mike and his mother didn't look alike. She was short, petite, with wavy blonde hair and blue eyes. Was he secretly adopted?

"Who's this?" his mother asked, a confused expression forming on her face when her eyes landed on Jane.

"My girlfriend." Mike said proudly. Jane beamed.

"Since when?"

"Half an hour ago."

"It's nice to meet you." Jane cut in since she felt like she should say something. She felt as if she was in the weirdest case of someone meeting their boyfriend's mother in history. "Jane Hopper."

She stuck her hand out for Jane to shake, which she did. "You too, sweetie. I'm Karen." She looked at her son. "Chief's daughter, huh Michael? Maybe she'll be a good influence on you."

"Are you calling me a troublemaker?" Mike asked

"You're coming home drunk." Karen pointed out. "Now go upstairs and lay down."

"Yes ma'am." Mike said sarcastically, grabbing Jane's hand and pulling her towards the stairs.

Her stomach did nervous summersaults as he led her through the house. They were going to his room. They would be alone. And his mom didn't seem to care. Holy shit.

Mike's bedroom was the last door in the hallway upstairs. She didn't have much time to study her surroundings since as soon as he shut the door behind him Mike put his hand on the back of her neck and kissed her again. Which she wasn't complaining about. Kissing Mike was a spiritual experience. Her cheeks flushed bright pink when she put her hands on his chest and felt his heart pounding as quickly as her own, if not more.

His lips eventually parted from hers and he rested his forehead against hers. "What time do you want to go home?"

"Never."

"Okay." He pulled away from her and went over to his dresser. "I'll give you some clothes to borrow from the night."

Jane raised an eyebrow at him. "Wait really?" she asked. "Are you sure? Your parents won't care that a girl's spending the night in your room? And we've both been drinking?"

Mike pulled out a pair of sweatpants and a t-shirt. "They don't really care about anything."

"Don't say that."

"It's true." He said. "You'll see." He opened the door and pointed at the one directly across the hall. "That's the bathroom. There's a spare toothbrush if you want it, and you can use my hairbrush."

Jane felt her face getting warm as she crossed the hall and went into the bathroom. She leaned her back against the closed door and let out a long, content sigh. She was spending the night at Mike's, Leo's, her boyfriend's house. The sense of safety and comfort she got from his emails was nothing compared to what it was like in person. Her head was reeling from the turn of events the day had taken. That morning she thought the craziest thing that would happen would be having one or two too many drinks. Man she was wrong.

She sent a quick text to Max letting her know where she was before changing into the clothes Mike had given her. They were definitely more comfortable than the clothes she had on, and although they looked nice she was glad to be out of them.

When she came back into Mike's room he was sitting on his bed, leaning against his headboard with his eyes closed. "Are you sleeping?" she asked, shutting the door behind her.

He opened his eyes and picked his head up. "No." he said defensively.

Jane sat down next to him, resting her head on his shoulder while his arms wrapped around her waist. She knew that they had a million things to talk about, but she was kind of glad that they were just enjoying their time together. At least for the time being. She didn't think it was possible to feel more content.

"Mike?"

"Hm?"

"Do you love me or are you just really drunk?"

He picked his head up. "I'm really drunk." He said. "But I also really love you. I think I only told you because I'm drunk. I wouldn't have been able to tell you if I wasn't."

"Why?"

"I'd rather not say it and wonder than say it and find out you don't feel the same way."

Jane looked up at him, a frown forming on her face. "Did you really think I wouldn't?"

Mike shrugged. "I don't know." He admitted. "It's hard to figure out what I actually think is true and what my anxiety thinks is true."

"Well either way it isn't." she said, pressing a kiss on his jaw. "You think I'd beg you to meet me for a year if I didn't?"

He laughed, "Yeah, I guess not."

"Hey" she said, "I'm glad you called me about the thing with your parents. And at the party earlier. You know I'm always here for you, right?"

"Yeah." He said, "You know I am too?"

"Yeah."

"Then how come you didn't tell me about your sister?"

Jane's stomach dropped down to the floor. She knew it was stupid to not tell him ever since the beginning. Even then she wasn't sure why she hadn't told him. She knew she could trust him, that wasn't the issue. She just couldn't bring herself to open up that much.

"I don't know." She admitted. "It was just too hard. Sarah was everything to me, my baby sister. It felt like I died too, you know?"

Mike started to run his fingers through her hair the way she had for him at the party. How she did for Sarah. "Yeah, I know." He said. "I

was really close with my grandma. I've always been nervous but it got bad when she died. That's when I started taking meds."

"It was really bad?" she asked.

"Yeah, imagine that, I used to be worse." Mike said.

"Yeah, me too." Jane agreed.

Mike kissed the top of her head. "Do you wanna talk about Sarah?" he asked her. "It might make you feel better."

She shook her head.

"Why?"

"I'm not ready to cry in front of you yet."

"I cried in front of you already." He pointed out.

Jane managed a laugh, as pathetic as it was it was still something.
"That was different. I'm not ready."

"I'll close my eyes."

"You're funny."

She sat up enough so that she could look at him. Jane would never stop looking. Now that she didn't have to deny the crush she was developing out of guilt because of Leo she was completely smitten. It was unfair that he not only had such a charming personality but that he was also so good looking. She wanted a refund on her genetics.

Mike really was gorgeous. 80s haircut and all. Her hears that she would be plain in comparison to him were confirmed yet she found that she didn't care. It was clear that he liked her the way she was, both when her walls came down and how she presented herself to the public. He really liked her. Loved her, in fact. It would be selfish to ask for much more.

Jane closed the distance between them and pressed her lips against his for the dozenth time that night. As pathetic as it may have

sounded Jane had never kissed anyone at the sage of seventeen. She'd started talking to Leo around the time everyone in her year began getting involved with things like kissing. She had never had much interest if it couldn't be with him.

She figured that most new couples weren't as comfortable as they already were. Though they technically weren't new. After everything they'd spoken about Jane didn't exactly feel shy around him. There was no time for being shy when she'd waited a year to be with him.

Mike's hands trailing down to her hips to pull her closer to him sent goosebumps up her skin. His touch was intoxicating, more than any alcohol at any party.

"I think I'm dreaming." He mumbled against her lips.

"You're not."

"Damn."

She could have kissed him for hours on end. But he'd drank a lot and she could tell he was getting tired, and she would still be there in the morning. Jane managed to coax him into laying down and played with his hair until he couldn't keep his eyes open anymore. She had no clue how long she lay there looking at him. It felt like an eternity and a second all at once.

When her phone started ringing on the bedside table she scrambled to answer it before it woke Mike up. She knew it was Max even before she looked at the caller ID. "Hello?" she asked in a hushed voice.

"Hey, it's me." Max said. "I couldn't wait until tomorrow. What happened? Where did you guys go?"

Jane sat up and leaned against the headboard. "Okay so remember when he called me at the party? He was upstairs really upset so I went to find him and we took a walk so he could calm down." She explained. "I told him that you think he has a thing for me, and he said his friends thought I had a thing for him. And I basically told him I do have a thing for him."

"What?!" she exclaimed. "No way! What happened then?"

"Well I told him it was complicated."

"Because of Leo?" Max guessed.

"Yeah." Jane said. "I told him that he's really special to me but it was hard. I said that we've never meet and I didn't even know his name. Then Mike got this really weird look on his face, like he was going to be sick or something. And I thought I was making him feel bad so I basically said that I really liked him but that it was just complicated. Then he told me he was Leo."

"You're kidding."

"Nope. He knew things that he wouldn't know if he wasn't." Jane said. "Like he knew why I'm doing the school play. I only told you, my dad, and Leo. There's no way Mike would know that."

"Holy shit." Max said, sounding as surprised as Jane had felt. "What happened next?"

"We went inside and talked for a little. Then I went to get him some water, and when I came back he looked at me kind of weird, and he said he wanted to kiss me."

"Oh my god."

"He's a really good kisser."

"And you're at his house now?" Max asked. "What about his parents?"

"He said it would be fine. I met his mom."

"Yikes. How was that?"

Jane laughed. "Weird and short. He practically dragged me up the stairs."

"Double yikes. So you guys are dating now?"

She looked down at Mike, sleeping on his side facing her. She felt

way too lucky. "Yeah, I think so. He told his mom I was his girlfriend, so that's something."

"So then there you go."

Jane bit down on her bottom lip. "If I tell you something will you tell me if I'm crazy?"

"Of course."

"I'm pretty sure I'm in love with him."

Max scoffed. "Of course you are. You've been in love with him." She said. "That doesn't change because you're only meeting him now. You guys have been together for an hour and a half and a year and a half at the same time."

"Yeah, that's true." Jane said. "I'm just scared I'm gonna scare him off, you know? We just got together and I don't wanna mess it up. It's been a year and a half and I haven't yet but how much longer will that last?"

"Cut it out Hopper." Max chastised her. "Don't get sucked into the self sabotage. You don't ruin anything, and you won't ruin this. That boy is crazy about you."

Jane could have cried. "You're the best. Seriously."

"I know." Max said. "Get some sleep, okay? And call me when you get home. I want details."

"Understood."

Jane hung up and turned her phone on silent before getting underneath the blankets. She curled up as close to Mike as she could get, wrapping her arms around his waist and burying her face in his neck. A hangover was waiting or her in the morning and she knew it. But it didn't matter as long as he would be there too. As Jane drifted off to sleep she couldn't quite believe where she was and who was next to her.

10. Leo: Catching Up

A headache from the sun leaking through his bedroom window woke Mike up from perhaps the craziest dream he'd ever had. He'd called Virgo at the party but Jane answered the phone. Then they took a walk and he figured out that she was Virgo and they kissed a lot. If the headache wasn't enough of a clue that he'd drank too much the night before the dreams only confirmed it. Mike always had crazy dreams when he drank too much.

He rolled onto his back and opened his eyes, having to blink a few times before his vision was clear. His heart stopped for a moment when he saw someone sitting up in bed next to him looking at their phone in their lap. The curly hair and shirt she had borrowed from him made it obvious it was Jane.

Holy shit.

Mike pushed himself upright and wrapped his arm around her waist, resting his head on her shoulder. She hugged him back almost immediately, pressing a kiss on his head.

"How hungover are you?" she asked him.

"Honestly not as bad as I expected." He said, "I thought I dreamed everything for a second."

"Was it a good dream?"

"The best one I've ever had." Mike picked his head up and threw the blankets off his legs. "I have to go brush my teeth so I can kiss you."

Jane laughed as he hurried into the bathroom across the hall and grabbed his toothbrush off the counter. Holy shit. It was real. Virgo was real. And not only was she beautiful and amazing and fun but she had spent the night in his room.

Mike paused in his doorway, watching Jane as she looked at one of the posters on his wall while she tied her hair up. It took her a moment for her to notice him standing there, and when she did a

wide smile spread on her face. "What?" she asked.

"I wanna memorize this." Mike answered.

"Take a picture, it'll last longer." Jane said, repeating one of the first things she ever said to him.

Mike rolled his eyes. "That's still a stupid joke."

"But it made you smile both times."

It had.

Mike sat across from her on his bed and closed the distance between them. Kissing Jane was even better when he was sober and clear minded. He was able to hear how her breath came out shaky and nervous after his lips met hers. He could feel how warm her fingertips were against his cheeks and how her eyelashes gently brushed against his own.

He thought it was pretty safe to say he was completely in love with her. He had been for some time. In the back of his mind Mile always worried that things wouldn't be the same between them in person. That their connection was phone exclusive.

But it wasn't. Jane had a magnetic pull that constantly drew him in. She had a beautiful way with words that she didn't use often enough. And her voice, although different in person and over the phone, was beautiful both ways. And the way she looked at him, even before the party, was like he was the only person she saw. He always had her undivided attention.

"Holy shit."

They quickly pulled away from each other, Jane collapsing face down onto his bed and hiding her beet red face while Mike turned to face Nancy in the now open doorway.

"Oh, so mom forgot the knocking lesson with you growing up too?" Mike asked, his tone heavy with sarcasm and his expression clearly annoyed.

"I heard you came home last night from a party, drunk, with a girl." Nancy looked past him to Jane. "I didn't expect her to still be here. You've got balls suddenly."

Drunk Mike was really bad at decision making.

"Is mom still home?"

Nancy shook her head. "Out with the girls, but she's coming back in an hour. I suggest you guys leave and come back after she does and pretend like she didn't spend the night." She nodded in Jane's direction. "Are you gonna introduce me or what?"

Mike grabbed Jane's sleeve and pulled it so she would sit up. Her face was still red and she couldn't look directly at Nancy. "This is Nancy, my sister. She's really annoying and has no boundaries."

"Hysterical, Mike."

He continued as if she hadn't interrupted him. "Nancy, this is my girlfriend Jane."

"How long has that been going on?"

Mike looked down at the watch he wasn't wearing. "10 hours."

"How'd you guys meet?"

"Which time?" Jane mumbled.

Mike cut in. "It's complicated." They had to be out of the house within the hour and there was nowhere near enough time to get into the Leo/Mike Virgo/Jane saga. "We're gonna get something to eat, I'll tell you when we get back okay?"

Nancy didn't look satisfied. He loved her but she was nosy. "Fine." She said. "But I want details. You're shit at telling stories."

"Go away."

Mike looked back at Jane and couldn't help but smile at her red face. "I'm mortified." She told him. "Totally and completely mortified. I

have to go into the witness protection program now."

"It's fine." He tried to assure her, "At least it wasn't Holly."

"Is that your little sister?"

He nodded and went over to his dresser to give her another shirt to borrow. "I would have had to bribe her into not telling my parents. That kid takes bribes very seriously."

"Maybe she can get her own small business running at school." Jane suggested.

Mike laughed, pulling out a black t shirt for her. "Knowing her it would turn into a full time job."

She went across the hall to chance while Mike stayed in his room to do the same. Seeing her backpack on the floor and her phone on his nightstand made his heart race. Jane had long ago made her mark in his mental world. Now that she was in her physical world Mike felt like an idiot for keeping her at arms distance for so long. He'd anticipated being a nervous wreck around her when they finally officially met, but he couldn't remember being so comfortable with anyone besides Will and Nancy in a long time.

Even in the same jeans she'd worn yesterday and hair that probably needed to be washed she was still the most beautiful girl he'd ever seen. His stomach did a backflip when she came back into his room.

"You're giving me a look again."

"What look?"

Jane shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know. A *look*. Like you're thinking something."

"I think you're beautiful."

She came over and wrapped her arms around his waist and rested her head against his chest. He wondered if she could hear his heart pounding. "What do you want to get for breakfast?"

"Benny's?"

"Perfect?"

Jane left her stuff in his room since they were coming back later on. She sat facing him in the passengers seat of his car as he drove across town towards the restaurant. Having her there with him felt so natural. Like they'd been doing it forever. Mike was dangerously smitten with her already. Though he knew that Jane's feelings could be at the same level as his he didn't care all that much. The fact that she had any kind of feelings was enough of a miracle.

As they got out of the car and made their way up to the front door Mike thought about how they'd come to the very same place when Jane got in a fight with Max. A fight that he had no clue was about him. They sat in the same booth they had before, Mike noticing that Jane looked a lot less worried than she had the first time. There was a question nagging at Mike but he decided to wait until they ordered. Procrastinating a possibly difficult conversation was his specialty.

"Jane can I ask you something?" Mike finally asked once the waitress wrote down their ordered and walked back to the kitchen to deliver it.

"You just did."

Mike rolled his eyes. "Cute."

"I thought so." She took a sip from her waiter. "What's up?"

"How come you never told me about your sister?"

He could see Jane tense at the subject and regretted bringing it up almost instantly. Mike could only imagine how hard it was for her to deal with something like that. But he had to know why she'd never told him. They'd talked about everything under the sun in a year and a half, how had she not mentioned it even once?

She looked down at her hands in her lap. "It's stupid."

"Tell me."

"Well it was really fresh when we met so I couldn't really talk about it to anyone without having a breakdown." Jane began. "And I told you

my mom cheated on my dad because I couldn't tell you the real reason without telling you about Sarah. Then I kind of realized it had been too long to have a good reason for not telling you so I just kind of crossed my fingers and hoped it would never come up."

Mike put his hands on the table for her and she laced her fingers through his. "Yeah, but you know you can tell me anything."

Jane nodded. "Yeah, I know." She said. "It's just... it's so hard to even think about her. Still. We did everything together. She was my life. It felt like part of me died when she did."

He leaned over the table to get closer to her and Jane did the same. "She was sick, right?"

"Leukemia." She said. "The hospital in the next town over is the best in the state. We used to live in Indianapolis, which was too far away, so we moved here." She looked down at their hands and Mike could tell she was struggling, but she continued before he could tell her she didn't have to keep going. "I didn't talk to anyone when I first moved here, but Max was determined to be my friend and I eventually gave in. She came to the funeral even though he only met Sarah twice. Will and his family came, too."

"Yeah, I remember him telling me about it." Mike told her. "He said you and Max kept him company and you were really nice but he felt bad because he could tell you didn't want to be there."

A small smile spread on her face. "Yeah, he was right about that. But the three of us were the only kids there, and his brother couldn't come so I didn't want him to be all by himself so he sat with us."

"So... if your mom didn't cheat on your dad then why did they get a divorce?" Mike hated seeing Jane so sad but these were answers he needed to know. And once they finished talking about it he planned on never bringing it up again.

"Well after Sarah died we were all a mess. Obviously. I didn't go to school for 2 months, my dad started drinking a lot, and my mom wouldn't let any of us even go into her room. And I think she couldn't deal with our grief on top of her own so she moved back with her

parents."

"And she just... left you?"

Jane shrugged. "She'd just lost her daughter."

"Yeah but she still had another one that needed her."

"I didn't need her." Jane said. "I needed Sarah."

It still didn't sit well with Mike. What mother could just leave her daughter? Especially after going through what Jane just had? It simply blew his mind. "Do you ever see her?"

Jane shook her head. "I haven't seen her since she picked up the last of her things. I might have if she tried to stay in touch with me, but she didn't try very hard."

Mike felt disgusted. And he thought he'd been given a crappy pair of parents. Even his father, as bad as he could be, *tried* to be involved with them. He just didn't try very hard. And though the divorce was in its early stages Mike knew neither of his parents would move out of state to get away from them. "Jesus Christ, Jane. I'm so sorry."

They spotted their waitress coming with their food and separated while they set their plates down, joining hands once again when she left. "I wanna ask you something now."

"Good deflecting."

Jane rolled her eyes but otherwise ignored him. "Why didn't you want to meet me? Really?"

"I told you why."

"Explain it better."

Mike sighed. "Well first of all I did want to meet you. I've wanted to meet you ever since I asked you if you wanted to talk privately."

Jane's jaw dropped open. "What? That was so long ago!"

"I know."

"But how come you never said you wanted to?" she asked him. "Even when you knew we lived so close together?

"I just... I thought you were so cool. And smart, and funny, and just the perfect girl." Jane rolled her eyes at him again. "The fact that I was right is beyond the point. I just thought that it was so cool that you thought I was interesting to talk to online. I figured I'd be really be pushing my luck if I expected you to like me in person. I mean, I'm so lame compared to you, you know? And I was scared that you would see that and wouldn't talk to me. And I guess I just couldn't lose you like that."

Jane squeezed his hand. "But I think you're awesome. I always have. And I don't understand why you can't believe that."

"I do believe it." Mike assured her. "I just didn't want that to change."

"But it wouldn't." Jane insisted. "If anything I think you're even better in person." Mike rolled his eyes at her, which she didn't seem to like. "I'm serious, Mike. Don't you think I was scared of the same thing? You think way to highly of me and I didn't want you to be disappointed."

"You would never disappoint me."

"And neither would you." Jane said. "I promise that you have lived up to all my expectations and then some."

Mike felt his cheeks flush. Jane always knew exactly what to say to make him feel better. Getting to hear it in her voice, while looking at her, was a luxury he was grateful to have. He leaned across the table and brought her hands up to kiss her knuckle. "You're amazing."

"Right back at you."

Once the topic moved onto lighter topics they began eating. Mike was glad that Jane didn't seem insecure about eating in front of him. In fact Jane didn't seem insecure about most things. She seemed just as comfortable as he felt, which was a relief. Mike kept expecting to wake up from the most perfect dream of his life.

"So you knew I lived close," Jane said in between bites, "and that I probably went to school with you. Did you have any guesses as to who I was?"

Mike shook his head. "There was a list of possibilities, but too long to be really sure of one person."

"How sure were you that it was me?"

"You weren't even on the list." Mike said with a laugh. "But Will knew it was you. He kept trying to convince me but I didn't believe him."

Jane's eyes went wide. "How'd he know?"

"I think he's psychic or something." He joked, "Speaking of which, I think I know who your dad's secret girlfriend is."

She raised an eyebrow at him. "Who? Joyce?"

Mike nodded. "Remember that night you said he came home with a tie? He picked Joyce up that night and they went to dinner. I was there when he came over and Joyce looked way too excited for hanging out with a friend."

"Holy crap." Jane said. "That's awesome, I love Joyce. Why wouldn't he tell me about that?"

He shrugged. "He probably didn't want you to feel like he was trying to replace your mom."

"He should replace her." Jane said. "She wasn't very good at her job."

"You have a point."

In typical Jane fashion she changed the subject with expert subtlety. "Max didn't think it was you." She told him. "But I told her I was frustrated the night of the party and basically implied I should cheat on you with you."

Mike grinned. "You almost did."

"Almost." She repeated.

"I have a feeling this is going to get a little confusing." He said, even though it already was a little confusing. "All this Leo/Mike Virgo/Jane is kind of hard to keep track of."

"A little." She agreed. Her thumb gently rubbing the back of his hand sent goosebumps up his arm. "Whose idea was it anyway to use fake names?"

"Pretty sure it was you."

"Well Jane from a year and a half ago was pretty stupid."

"Hey, watch your mouth, that's my girlfriend you're talking about."

He watched her cheeks turn pink. Mike was tempted to take his phone out of his pocket and snap a picture of her. "Yeah, well, I think you should drop her for me."

Mike hummed while he pretended to think about it. "Fine. But only because you're cute."

Her face flushed even darker and she looked down at her plate. She was adorable.

They finished their breakfast and got into his car with another half an hour to kill until his mom got home. Mike knew he had to tell Will, and eventually the rest of his friends, about what happened so he decided to drive to his house. On the way to the Byers' place on the other side of town Jane took her phone out and called her dad, putting him on speakerphone.

"What's up kid?" he asked when he finally answered.

"The jig is up Jim." She said jokingly. "I know your secret."

Mike heard a laugh on the other line. "Oh yeah? What secret is that?"

"That you're dating Joyce Byers."

Hopper was silent for a moment, likely debating whether or not to keep up the secret. "Who told you that?" he eventually asked her.

"One of Will's friends."

"Was it Wheeler?"

Shit.

Jane managed to suppress a laugh. "It doesn't matter who it was." She told him, which Mike was thankful for. "What matters is that you don't have to go sneaking around anymore."

"I wasn't sneaking." He defended.

She scoffed at him. "Please, you sneak around more than I do. Which is really saying something since I'm 17 and it's my job to sneak around."

He laughed again. "Yeah, well, I guess I'll pass the torch back to you, then."

"I'll take it happily." She said, "If you tell me everything I've been missing when you get home tonight."

"Deal." Hopper agreed. "Chinese takeout?"

"Of course."

"Sounds like a plan."

Jane looked over at him once she'd hung up the phone. It was easy to forget how she could be when the depression got the best of her when she smiled so brightly at him. "The case of the mystery girlfriend has been solved."

"I'm honestly sad to see it go."

"I'm not." Jane said. "I don't like him sneaking around and hiding things from me."

"Jane, sweetie, light of my life, don't you think that's a bit hypocritical?"

He was glad she laughed and didn't seem offended. "Yeah, it is. I suppose I should tell him everything."

"Probably."

Mike parked his car behind Johnathan's in front of the Byers' house. He could feel the familiar, and unnecessary, feeling of anxiety creeping up his throat and grabbing hold of his heart. Wy he was nervous he had no clue. Just his brain on the fritz again. He was prepared to attempt to brush it off and head inside the house but Jane stopped him when he reached for the door handle.

"You okay?" she asked, a small crease of concern settling in her brow.

"Yeah," he said, trying to sound as casual as possible. "I'm fine."

"Liar. What's going on?"

Mike shrugged, wishing he had a better reason to tell her. The fact that he didn't have a valid reason for being so anxious only made him feel worse. "I don't know." He admitted to her. "Just nerves acting up, I guess."

"Do you need a hug?"

That was exactly what he needed.

They both got out of the car and Jane walked over to his side. She stood on her toes and locked her arms around his neck in the tightest hug anyone had ever given him. He held her by the waist and buried his face in her neck, not caring how much he had to bend down to do so. In a way they'd only met the day before, and yet she might have cared about him more than anyone else in his life, the possible exception being Will and Nancy. She knew more about his life than his parents ever had and tried harder to know what she didn't already than they ever would.

"You know, what I said last night" he said, his voice coming out muffled from her hair, "about being in love with you? I really meant it. I didn't just say it because I was completely wasted."

He felt her turn her face towards him. "Are you sure?"

Mike couldn't help but laugh. "Are you kidding? Of course I'm sure." He said, picking his head up so he was able to look at her. "I mean, this whole thing is kind of confusing. Technically we only met yesterday. But I feel like I've known you forever. And I have no idea

where I'd be right now without you." He shook his head, "I probably sound crazy."

Jane shook her head and placed both her hands on his cheeks. "No, not at all." She told him. "You remember I said I love you too, right?"

"Honestly, I couldn't tell if that was a memory or wishful thinking."

She laughed, a sound that made his heart swell. She always said in her emails that he made her laugh but actually getting to hear and see it made him wonder if he could ever be happier.

His question was answered when she pulled him down to her height so she could kiss him.

11. Virgo: Jim and Jane

Sorry for the delayed update on this (and all of my stories). I've been so incredibly busy and haven't written a word in like a month. But here I am with an update :) I hope all of you enjoy.

"And you carry the 2, then divide by 5."

"I don't wanna do this."

"You have to."

Jane sat on her bed with her overdue homework spread out in front of her and Mike on speakerphone in her lap. She'd sent him pictures of all the work she had to do so that he could help her with it. She tried to insist that he didn't need to do that for her but he wouldn't hear it. Jane wished he could come over to help but her dad had likely already left the station and they had a lot to talk about before Mike came over to the house.

"Jane when was the last time you did your math homework?"

"When was the last time I told you I did it?"

"Jesus Christ, Jane." She could picture him shaking his head at her perfectly. "You need to do your homework or you won't be able to graduate next year."

She let out a sigh, trying not to sound annoyed. "Yeah, I know." She told him. "I'm trying."

"I know you are." Mike said. "I just don't want you to be stuck in Hawkins. I want the option for college to be there if you end up deciding you want it."

"You know I don't want it."

"I also know you could change your mind." Mike pointed out. "You're gonna talk to your dad about meds right?"

"Yeah. I just don't anyone to get their hopes up, you know? Even me."

"It's good to not get your hopes up too high." Mike agreed. "But it's also not good when your expectations are too low."

Jane didn't think her expectations were too low at all. But she also didn't think Mike would like it very much if she told him so. "When are you coming to rehearsal next?" she asked him instead.

"I can come tomorrow if you want me to."

"I want you to."

"Then I'll be there." She could hear the smile in his voice. "And after I can come and help you with your homework more."

Jane groaned. "That better be a euphemism for something and not literal."

His laugh filled the speaker of her phone and forced a smile onto her face. "Nope, sorry, I mean exactly what I said. We're gonna do at least a little bit from every class."

"*Every* class?" she repeated back.

"Yep, every class." He confirmed. "Jane I know you can do it. You just need a little motivation."

"And what's my motivation?"

"I haven't figured that out yet." He admitted. "But I'll come up with something."

"Yeah well it better be something good." She told him, "Because it's gonna take a miracle to get me to do homework from *every* class. That's simply asking too much of me."

"You know, believe it or not, some people do homework for all their classes every day."

Jane let out a dramatic gasp. "You're joking."

"No, really, I've heard some people do it."

"That's just insane." From her bedroom she could hear the muffler on her dad's truck rattling as he pulled into the driveway. "My dad just got home." She told Mike. "I'll talk to you later."

"Good luck."

"I'll need it."

She hung up the phone and headed towards the living room to wait for her dad to come in. Butterflies were filling her stomach in anticipation of the conversation they would have. It had been a long time since the two of them had any kind of serious conversation, and the fact that he had something to say too didn't make her feel much better. If anything it made it worse. How the hell was she supposed to get through this?

By the time she watched the door open and her dad step in its place her heart felt just about ready to pound out of her chest. Her dad came inside, hung his coat up on the rack and turned towards her. "Should we get this over with?"

Jane was glad they seemed to be on the same page when it came to their enthusiasm about their talk. She nodded and lead the way to the kitchen table, both of them sitting in their usual seats across from each other. She watched him shift nervously in his chair while she sat uncomfortably still. "How did you find out about Joyce?" he finally asked.

"It's a *really* long story I'll tell you after." Jane replied. "How come you never told me? Joyce is awesome, I would have been happy for you."

Jim let out a sigh and crossed his arms across his chest. "I don't know, Jane. After the way things ended with your mother I wasn't sure if you were ready for there to be another woman in your life. Or if you even wanted one at all. I figured by the time Joyce and I got serious enough you'd start to feel better. It just never felt like the right time."

Her face flushed with the overwhelming feeling that she was a disappointment. She knew she was but hearing someone else say it

packed more of a punch than thinking it to herself. "Just because I'm not happy doesn't mean I don't want you to be."

"It know. It's a parent thing, kid."

Jane hated when he used being a parent as an excuse to not explain something. "So how long have you been seeing her?"

He hesitated for a moment before answering, likely trying to figure out the answer. "Around 7 months."

She shook her head at him. "And you never thought, not once, to mention it to me?"

"Kid, it's not that I didn't want to tell you." Jim said, resting his elbows on the table. "I know you love Joyce, and I know you would have been happy. It's just that when your kid is struggling you'll do whatever you can to help, even if the chance of it actually helping is small." He shifted in his chair that creaked with the movement. "I just love you so much, Janey. All I want is for you to be okay."

Jane struggled to blink back tears. Her dad definitely wasn't the warm and fuzzy type whatsoever. So on the occasion when he did say something from the heart she felt as if his words had the impact of a punch to the chest. "I actually wanted to talk to you about that."

"Oh yeah?"

"I've been thinking, and talking about it with someone, and maybe..." she bit down on her bottom lip. "Maybe I should go on medication or something."

A bittersweet smile crossed over her fathers face and he put his hand on top of the table for her to hold. "You know, I'm really proud of you kid."

"Why?"

"Because you're doing better than you think you are."

She wasn't too sure about that but knew better than to say anything.

"What made you change your mind?"

"My... boyfriend. He takes medication and said it really helped him and said I should give it a try."

He raised an eyebrow at her. "Boyfriend?" he asked. "So you've been keeping things from me too?"

"Well that technically only started yesterday so no."

"Technically?"

"It's really complicated." She said, "Short or long version?"

"Long."

She let out a long sigh. "Okay. We met a year and a half ago online in a chatroom. We clicked really well and started talking privately. We just called each other by our pen names so I never really knew his real name. But I knew pretty much everything else about him, and he knew pretty much everything else about me."

"After a year I started trying to get him to meet me. He never said why but I knew he didn't really want to. I tried compromising and getting him to talk to me on the phone but he didn't really want to do that either. Then one day I was hanging out with Max and he asked if he could call me. He was really upset because his parents told him they were getting a divorce."

"Geez."

"His parents are a mess." Jane said, shaking her head. "His father's clueless and his mother practically forgot he existed. But when I gave him my number to call me he said he knew we lived close to each other by my area code. I tried to get him to tell me where he lived but he wouldn't say."

"And while all this is going on I'm confused because I started hanging out with Will's friend Mike, and he's really awesome and I kind of liked him but Leo, the guy I was talking to, is really important to me and I didn't know what to do. Then yesterday I went to a party and Mike was there and we went for a walk and I told him how I felt about both him and Leo. And turns out Mike was Leo the whole time."

Her dad blinked at her a few times while everything she said processed in his mind. Jane hoped that after Mike told his friend, which he said he would do while she talked to her dad, they wouldn't have to tell the full story of how they met for a while. It was far too complicated to explain every time they told someone they were dating.

"Okay. That's... confusing." Her dad eventually said.

"I know."

"So you've been together for a year and a half but started dating yesterday?"

"Pretty much, yeah."

"Geez." He said again, rubbing his forehead. "And he didn't know who you were either?"

Jane shook her head. "He knew I lived near Hawkins, and that we might have gone to school together, but he never thought it was me."

"I've seen Wheeler dozens of times at Joyce's house." He said, "Who would have thought?"

"Not me."

"And he's on medication?" Jane nodded. "What for?"

"He has anxiety." She explained. "It helps keep him calm."

Jim nodded a few times. "Yeah, he's definitely a nervous kid." He agreed. "So you really wanna start taking medication?"

"I want to feel better."

They were still sitting at the table talking when Max called her and asked if she wanted to go out and get something to eat. Her dad insisted that he was fine eating alone so she ran to her room to get changed and wait for her best friend to show up. Jane sent Mike a text letting him know that the talk with her dad had gone well and he replied that he'd told Dustin and Lucas and that although they

were confused and slightly hurt they were happy for him.

Jane tried to keep her hopes and expectations in check but it didn't come easy. She couldn't help but feel like things were, for the first time in years, starting to look up. Her social circle was bigger than ever, she and her dad were finally open with each other, she had an amazing boyfriend, and she finally had a first step on how to get better planned. Though she doubted anything could fully heal the wound left by Sarah's death she was wondering if maybe she could finally have the happy medium that many with passed loved ones were able to find.

She could hear the rattling of Max's second hand car pull onto her street and Jane gave her dad a kiss on the cheek before meeting her best friend outside. Max turned down the volume of the radio as she jumped into the passenger's seat and grinned at her.

"Hello my no longer single friend." She said, pulling back onto the road and away from Jane's house. "You look like you're having a lovely day."

Jane rolled her eyes but couldn't deny that she was right. "How long do you think you're going to tease me for?"

"However long you're with Mike."

Jane hadn't anticipated wanting her teasing to go on for a long time.

"So tell me all the juicy details." Max continued. Jane could tell by the roads she was taking that they were heading to the ice cream parlor in town. "You spent the night at his house, you guys must have been busy."

Jane rolled her eyes at her. "Not really. He was really drunk. We just kind of talked until he fell asleep."

"If you tell me you haven't kissed him yet I'm driving to his house right now."

"No, no, I've kissed him. Don't do that." Jane said quickly. The absolute last thing she needed was her over excited best friend, who Jane had told all her hope and heartbreak about Leo/Mike, showing

up on her doorstep to embarrass him. "It's so weird, it feels like I've known him forever. Even though I only really found out who he was yesterday it doesn't feel like that."

Max shrugged her shoulders. "That makes sense." She said to her. "You said you felt like you knew him forever when you were only talking over text. And you and Mike clicked really well in person. I think it would be strange if you guys had the first date jitters all of a sudden."

Jane laughed and shook her head. "No, not really. I mean I have butterflies, obviously, but I'm completely comfortable with him."

Max leaned over and clapped her hand on Jane's shoulder. "I'm proud of you, best friend." She said, pretending to tear up. "My little Janey is finally blossoming into a young woman."

"Oh god."

"Jokes aside I'm totally happy for you." Max continued, ignoring her. "I was beginning to get really fed up with all the Leo drama and suggest you date Mike instead."

Jane couldn't help but laugh again. "I feel like you were doing that already."

Max joined her in laughing. "Whatever, point is that I'm happy for you. Let me be."

Jane did let her be. She could handle Max's teasing. Especially when she knew her intentions were pure. Besides, out of all the things to be teased out Jane would gladly take having a boyfriend as a reason.

12. Leo: Epilogue

I know it took a while, and I appreciate you bearing with me, but we've finally reached the end of this story! I had so much fun writing it and reading all your lovely reviews, and I hope you'll stick around for some of my other stories. Enjoy this last chapter :)

In the back row of the Hawkins High School auditorium Mike Wheeler was rushing to set up the camera and tripod so he could return to his seat in the front row. He'd done the same set up every other week for a little bit more than 3 months and it came as second nature to him. Mike pressed record and raced through the crowded isles to his seat in the front row in between Will and Max. He knew he had lots of time before the play actually started, but he also knew how angry he would be with himself if he missed even a second of it. Even though Jane's dialogue lasted about 5 seconds.

He collapsed into his seat between his friends and could see Max snickering beside him. "Come back from running a marathon or something?" she asked him

"Funny." He replied sarcastically. "I don't want to miss it."

"Her dad isn't even here."

Mike turned his head and looked past Will at the two empty seats the Jim and Joyce had been occupying when he got up to fix the camera. Mike shook his head and looked back at the stage in front of them. "Whatever." He said, "Then I'm a little early."

"Dweeb." Max muttered.

"Shouldn't you be backstage right now?" he asked her, "You know, being part of stage crew and all?"

"Nope." She replied. "I was part of the crew that created all the sets. Once we finished those my job was done."

Having his point taken Mike chose to stay quiet and pulled his phone

out of his pocket to send a text to Jane. He didn't know if she was the type to get stage fright, from what he could tell she didn't seem to be, but that was also the type of thing that she would be good at hiding. *You're gonna do awesome, I can't wait to see you* he typed out and sent before setting his phone in his lap and letting his leg bounce anxiously up and down.

A few minutes later Jim and Joyce reappeared with water bottles and snacks they handed out before taking their seats. Mike was just digging into his bag of twizzlers when his phone rang with his girlfriends reply. *I'm gonna look like a crazy person, don't laugh when you see my makeup.*

Mike was tempted to ask her to send a picture but managed to control himself.

As the lights began to dim and the play started up he couldn't help but be slightly thankful that Jane had been somewhat forced into joining the play. He knew that she was bored at every rehearsal and the night before she'd tried to perused him into letting an understudy take over for her so they could have a date night. But if her grades hadn't slipped and the guidance counselor hadn't suggested it Mike doubted they would have ever met each other. Did he want her to have poor grades? Of course not. But would he prefer her academics to slip to allow them to meet? Sadly.

xXx

A little more than half an hour later Mike was heading towards backstage with his camera hanging around his neck and a bouquet of flowers in his hand. Was it a bit ridiculous to buy Jane flowers when she only had one actual line? Maybe. But he was proud of her for going outside her comfort zone, which was something he knew didn't exactly come easy to her. The school hallways were packed and Mike searched through the seemingly infinite number of faces for hers.

When he finally spotted her she had changed out of her clothes but left her stage makeup on, which made it hard to recognize her for a moment. She was made to look pale, tired, hungry, and crazy. Her hair had even been straightened and teased to make her look even more wild. Yet when her eyes met his across the crowd and her face

lit up in recognition she was still his beautiful girlfriend. She weaved her way through the crowd to reach him and threw her arms around his neck when she finally did.

"Did you buy me flowers?" she asked him.

"Yeah."

"You know I was only in the play for like two minutes?"

"I know."

Jane pulled away from him and took the flowers, her cheeks flushing pink, before she went to give her dad a hug. "I'm proud of you, kid." He whispered in her ear, and her face turned even redder.

"They made you look like a psycho." Max said with a wide grin, "I love it."

"I'm thinking of showing up to school like this tomorrow." Jane joked.
"Don't you think it suits me?"

"Yeah, a little too well."

Jane punched her arm but laughed none the less.

They took 2 cars to head across town for ice cream at Benny's. Mike, Will, and Max spent the car ride praising Jane for her short performance while she tried desperately to convince her to stop. In the 2 months that they'd started dating she hadn't gotten any better at taking compliments.

They went inside and met Jim and Joyce at a table next to the window, each of them ordering a bowl of ice cream. Mike wasn't surprised when the topic of conversation turned to life after the end of the school year in about a month.

"What are you boys thinking about doing in September?" Jim asked.

Mike glanced nervously at Will, who was already looking at him. Though his plans for college were becoming more solidified Mike still hated talking about it. Even thinking about being thrust from

everything familiar in his life into an entirely different chapter of his life made it difficult to breathe. He was thankful for his best friend when he volunteered to answer first.

"I'm going to major in digital media and minor in advertising." He said, digging his spoon into his bowl of ice cream for another scoop. "I'm hoping to combine the two into a career."

Joyce beamed at her son proudly while Jim nodded his head. Mike knew it was only a matter of time before the attention turned to him, he just didn't expect it to be immediately. "What about you, Mike?" Jim asked, turning to look at him. "What are you thinking of doing in September?"

Under the table he felt Jane's hand brush against his elbow, a silent reminder that she was there and supporting him. He cleared his throat quietly and looked down at his ice cream. "Well, my parents want me to major in business. And I think I'll listen to them because they're paying for it, after all. But I think I'll minor in film." In his peripheral vision he saw Jane look over at him in surprise and he couldn't help a small smile. "I really like it. And I don't think anything will come of it, but I think it'll help me survive majoring in business."

When he looked up a satisfied smile had spread across Jim's face and he was nodding his head. "That's really cool, Mike."

"He's really talented." Jane chimed in, quickly digging into the pocket of her sweatshirt for her phone. "I mean, every picture I take looks like shit-

"Language."

"-but Mike's *really* good." She looked through her photo gallery until she chose one and held it out for her father to see. "Recognize this?"

Jim blinked at the picture a few times before recognition crossed his face. "Is that the dying garden in front of the house?" Jane nodded her head. "That looks amazing! You'd almost think we watered it."

"I know." Jane agreed, putting her phone back in her pocket. "He's amazing. We'll be driving and he'll randomly pull over out of

nowhere to take a picture. And I'll have no idea what's there to take a picture of, and he'll show me and it's *fantastic*."

Mike felt his face flush bright red and before he knew it Will was chiming in. "When we first started testing out stuff for the play he took all these practice shots and they looked really professional." He gestured to the camera still hung around his neck. "Show them some."

He began to shake his head in protest but Jane took the camera for him and handed it to Will. Joyce and Jim laughed while he looked through Mike's SD card until his face lit up and he passed the camera across the table. "This one's great."

Jim beamed and the camera and lingered before handing it to his daughter and Mike wondered which picture Will could have chosen. When Jane finally got her hands on the camera and looked down at the screen her jaw dropped open and Mike leaned over her shoulder to look. His face ignited in flames when he saw a picture he'd taken of Jane at a dress rehearsal a few weeks ago when the costumes had finally been finished.

It was about two weeks before the party, when he was still struggling with his feelings for both Jane and Virgo. She came onto the stage wearing 17th century rags and somehow she still looked drop dead gorgeous. Though some of the other girls in the play were in the shot none of them were quite as in focus as Jane was. She was shouting something and had her arms stretched out in front of her. Though she had no enthusiasm for acting she was pretty damn good at it.

"This is amazing." She said, looking over at him. "I don't even remember seeing you take this."

Mike shrugged. "You were too caught up in the scene."

Jane cracked a small smile. "How many more pictures of me did you take in secret."

"That's the only one." He lied, taking the camera back before she could prove him wrong.

xXx

"Time check."

Jane turned on the screen of her phone. "11:30."

"Nice."

When Mike came back to the Hopper house Jim insisted that they wouldn't have all night together and that he'd be driving Mike home at 10 o'clock. But as time ticked on and he didn't come in to tell them it was time to leave they wondered if he'd forgotten. Then on a trip to the bathroom Jane saw that he'd fallen asleep on the couch and it seemed that until he woke up on his own Mike was staying.

He leaned back against the headboard and attempted to stifle a yawn, which made Jane perk up. "Are you tired?"

He immediately shook his head. "No, no, I'm awake."

"You know, if we're falling asleep when he wakes up and comes in to tell you to leave it might make him change his mind."

Mike thought for a moment, weighing his options. On the one hand if Hopper woke up in the middle of the night and came barging into the room while he slept in Jane's bed Mike was sure he'd be permanently traumatized. On the other hand if they woke him up and had him drive Mike home they were running the risk of missing a second opportunity to spend the night together. "That's a good idea."

"Do you want to borrow pajamas?"

"Only if you promise not to laugh when they don't fit."

Jane grinned and jumped to her feet, hurrying over to her dresser and digging through for something to change into. He was thankful when she pulled out a plain pair of sweatpants and plain t-shirt, even though she didn't seem like the type to wear fancy pajamas in the first place. She got her own change of clothes and they decided to both change in her room with their backs to one another, not wanting to take the chance of waking her dad up by going to the bathroom.

The hems of the sweatpants went halfway up his shin but Mike wasn't

complaining. He folded up his clothes and set them down on the floor beside her bed, catching a glimpse of her pulling her shirt over her head out of the corner of his eye by accident. His face flushed red and he hoped he didn't notice when she turned to face him.

"What you said before about college," she began, coming over and sitting on the bed, "you're really gonna major in business?"

Mike shrugged, sitting beside her and wrapping his arm around her waist. "Yeah. Why not?"

She rested her head on his shoulder. "You just don't seem like a business kind of guy."

"It's practical." Mike said, repeating what he'd been told many times at home. "And my parents want me to do it. Not that I would normally listen to them, but they're paying for it, so I feel like they should have a say. Does that make sense?"

Jane hummed quietly. "Maybe. But it's also important to do what you want to do." Jane told him. "They're paying for it, and that's great, but they're not the ones who have to sit through all the classes every day."

"I guess not." Mike agreed.

"Don't decide on a major. Not yet." Jane continued. "At least not right away. Take a business class and a film class, and whatever else you want. That way you can see what you really want to do."

Mike placed a grateful kiss on top of her head. Though he knew it was likely, being the pushover that he was, he would major in whatever his parents wanted he appreciated that she wanted him to be happy with and interested in what he was doing. "I love you Jane." He said, "Seriously, I don't know what I would do without you."

"Me neither." She agreed.

Not too much later his phone buzzed on the duvet next to him with a text from his mother asking when he was coming home. A text he rolled his eyes at and ignored. Jane noticed and picked her head up. "Everything okay?"

"She just wants to know when I'm coming home." He said.

"You gonna answer?"

"No."

She nodded and put her head back on his shoulder. "How've things been?" Though Jane was clearly trying to sound casual there was still a small hint of worry present in her voice.

"It's alright. Could be better, could be worse." He admitted. "They've stopped fighting and started giving each other the silent treatment. Which is better, but more awkward."

Jane sucked her teeth. "That's pretty immature, isn't it?"

"I guess. Your parents didn't do stuff like this?"

"No." she said. "They stopped living together so they would fight less and they sucked it up whenever I was around."

"That's considerate of them."

"I'm sorry you're going through this Mike." Jane turned towards him and curled up against his side. "You don't deserve any of this."

"It's okay."

"We should just run away somewhere." She suggested. "Somewhere bigger and better than Hawkins. Like Indianapolis or Chicago."

"Or New York."

"Or Los Angeles." Jane tilted her head up to look at him. "If you could go anywhere in the world right now where would you go?"

"Nowhere." Mike answered. "I'm happy right where I am."

Jane let out a laugh. "Oh yeah? And who's that?"

"Because I have the perfect person to keep me company ."

She hummed happily. "Okay, if you could go anywhere in the world

right now, and bring me with you, where would you go?"

Mike hesitated before answering, unsure what to say. Where would he go? Of course he thought about leaving and putting behind him forever. Often. But in order to save himself from the sting of disappointment he never really thought too hard about specifics. "I don't really know." He admitted. "I guess maybe somewhere warm, like Florida or California. But Chicago also sounds nice."

"Chicago's great." Jane gushed. "I have cousins there and I used to stay with them every summer in their apartment."

"My cousins live in the middle of nowhere so they always come to us."

She winced. "That sucks."

"Yeah."

"So we'll run away to Chicago." Jane said. "And stay in Florida during the summer. And we can do whatever we want, be whoever we want. Fuck high school."

"Yeah."

"And you can study film, if you want. I'll study psychology. Maybe."

Mike picked his head up, his interest suddenly peaking. "Psychology, huh?" he asked, "Where'd that come from?"

"Don't get all excited." She told him. "It's just something I've been thinking about. It might be nice to know why our brains are so fucked up, you know?"

"Yeah, it would." Mike agreed. "But you know, psychology is really hard. Are you sure you're up for all that homework?"

She hit his arm lightly. "I'm not doing it now." She reminded him. "I'm hoping I'll be alright by the time I start college. And if I'm not I'll take a gap year."

Mike gaped at her. "Jane that's *amazing*. Do you hear yourself right

now?" she rolled her eyes at him but he continued. "Three months ago you hardly even cared about whether or not you repeated the grade. Now you're talking about *majoring* in *psychology*? I don't think it's possible for me to be more proud of you."

Her cheeks flushed red and she quickly hid her face in his neck. "Shut up."

"Never." He wrapped both his arms around her face and squeezed her in a hug. "I love you Jane."

"I love you Mike."

The idea of leaving Hawkins, a town full of painful memories, was one that often tempted him. But he knew he could never truly leave it in his past as long as long as the only certain part of his future still lived there.